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**CULTURAL DISTANCES TOWARDS ESTONIA AND ESTONIANS  
ON THE EXAMPLE OF TARTU UNIVERSITY EXCHANGE  
STUDENTS**

Bachelor Thesis

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# Introduction

The topic of my thesis is ``Cultural distances between exchange students and Estonians on the example of the exchange students of Tartu University, Estonia``. The aim of this thesis is to show how exchange students of Tartu University (TU) see Estonia and Estonians. What are the main differences and similarities brought out in comparison with their home culture; what are the practical obstacles for exchange students to create more contacts with Estonians.

This topic is very appealing to me as I have been an active volunteer in Erasmus Student Network (ESN) for three years. The aim of ESN is to foster student mobility and to help exchange students. In my daily life I constantly come across with exchange students from all over the world and as this is a student-helping-student based activity, then with this work I would like to point out the main issues and topics that exchange students need to cope with while they are studying in Tartu University and staying in Estonia.

Ten years ago Estonia officially sent out its first students who could benefit from studying abroad with Erasmus programme. Erasmus in Estonia is ten years old today, but originally it was already born 21 years ago. The numbers of exchange students in Tartu have grown about ten times within these ten years - does this show that Estonia is an attractive place to get to know better or is this growth connected to mobility numbers increasing all over the world? Do the exchange students choose to come to Tartu or is it their choice to come here?

The cultural distances perceived by the exchange students is an important topic for many reasons: the raising number of exchange students in Tartu on one hand and some intolerance or even racism cases presented in the media on the other hand. How are the Estonians perceived and are both parties willing to adopt/adapt to the new situations?

In order to answer the questions raised above, the present research uses qualitative method. Ten semi structured interviews are analyzed on the font of Estonian culture and the exchange students' cultural distances perceived with Estonians. In addition two experts on this matter are interviewed and their opinions are compared to the thoughts of the students. An overview of related theoretical approaches and concept is presented in the present thesis. The analysis of cultural dimensions by Geert Hofstede is used as a main framework for analysis.

The thesis consists of two main parts – the first part concentrates on the theoretical overview of cultural distances on this issue and the current situation of exchange students and the second part is an analysis of the 10 interviews given by exchange students on their perception of Estonians and Estonia. In the theoretical part the different aspects of cultural distances, cultural adoption (and adaption) in Estonia and the backgrounds of university's exchange programmes are shown. In the last part of the thesis the answers to the research questions are presented and the results of empirical analysis are discussed in the context of former studies.

# I Theoretical overview

In this chapter an overview of three main concepts is given, moving from more general topics to more concrete concepts, related to present thesis. Firstly, the inter-, multi- and transcultural communication is introduced as one of the outcomes of globalization on cultural level. Countries' strategies regulating such communications are also described. Secondly, an overview of various terms related to cultural adaptation – the individual strategies for coping with cultural globalization - is given. The last subchapter concentrates on particular cultural dimensions that could be one of the bases for supporting or hindering the adaptation process.

## 1 Inter-, multi- and transcultural communication

*“ And then came a Greek doctor, or a Celtic legionary, a Grisonian landsknecht, a Swedish horseman, a Napoleonic soldier, a deserted Cossack, a Black Forest miner, a wandering miller's boy from the Alsace, a fat mariner from Holland, a Magyar, a pandoru, a Viennese officer, a French actor, a Bohemian musician- all lived on the Rhine, brawled, boozed, and sang and begot children there-and- Goethe, he was from the same pot, and Beethoven, and Gutenberg and Mathias Grünewald, and- oh, whatever- just look in the encyclopedia. They were the best, my dear! The world's best! And why? Because that's where the peoples intermixed. Intermixed- like the waters from sources, streams and rivers, so, that they run together to a great, living torrent” Zuckmayer, 1963 The Devil's General (Welsch: 1999)*

Culture is a shared meaning system, found among those who speak a particular language dialect, during a specific historic period, and in a definable geographic region (Triandis 1994). There is a rising importance of culture especially nowadays. “In the post Cold War the main difference of countries no longer lies in ideology, politics or economical strategies - the difference lies in culture” (Huntington 1999: 32). Globalization gives a lot of opportunities to get in contact with different cultures from all over the world. Some authors have named this phenomenon as the linkage between geography and communication that lies in the fact that all forms of communication occur *in space*, and that all spaces are produced through representation, which occurs *by means of communication* (Jansson & Falkheimer 2006). Approximately 30 different cultures of exchange students living under one roof in Tartu are a good example of this case.

As a result of such cultural globalization, the inter- and transcultural communication<sup>1</sup> is nowadays a reality that makes changes in the world. Cultures are not single islands that ignore, defame or combat one another, they have rather become a new form - transcultural, and it is society that passes the borders of one specific culture (Welsch 1999). ``Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond these, are found in the same way in other cultures. For *every* culture, all *other* cultures have tendentially come to be innerconnected or satellites`` (Welsch 1999). Cultures now are combined with other cultures, which means not many things/traditions/foods are specific to just one culture. Some authors have even stated that communication does not happen only along cultural borders, but along civilization borders. For example S.P. Huntington claims civilizations to be the largest form of independent culture and he divides modern civilization into nine main blocks: West, Latin- America, Africa, Islam, China, Hindi, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japan. The expansion of the West has created a possibility for one culture to start dominating around the world (Huntington 1999).

As the author of the present thesis understands, transculturality is also seen on the individual level - we no longer bear single country identity: one can be born in England, move to Germany at the age of 11, take a gap year in Argentina and marry a Moroccan - this person is able to link and undergo transition and most probably has more than one country's identity, this person is a perfect example of transculturality. Transculturality is preferred as it is capable of covering host and homeland features and combining them. The level of voluntariness, i.e. the aim of emigration to another land, and the time period of changing cultures depends on different aspects.

However, there are several different ways how it could be expressed in the particular case. For example, Smith and Bond (1999) have stated, that the successful and functioning coexistence depends both on the ground of immigration, and on the specific strategies made by states. For example, Smith and Bond have described a typology of cultural groups and contacts between them: indigenous people,

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<sup>1</sup> ``Interculturality- The conception of interculturality seeks ways in which such cultures could nevertheless get on with, understand and recognize one another. But the deficiency in this conception originates in that it drags along with it unchanged the premises of the traditional conception of culture. It still proceeds from a conception of cultures as islands or spheres. For just this reason, it is unable to arrive at any solution, since the intercultural problems *stem* from the island-premise

Transcultraulity-The concept seeks opportunities for tolerance and understanding, and for avoidance or handling of conflict. This is just as laudable as endeavors towards interculturality - but equally inefficient, too, since from the basis of the traditional comprehension of cultures a mutual understanding or a transgression of separating barriers cannot be achieved. As daily experience shows, the concept of multiculturality accepts and even furthers such barriers`` (W. Welsch 1999: 195)

Multiculturalty- ``takes up the problems which different cultures have living together *within one society*. But therewith the concept basically remains in the duct of the traditional understanding of culture; it proceeds from the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogenous cultures - the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community `` (Welsch 1999: 195).

sedentary, immigrants, sojourners, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Indigenous people have a foreign culture brought to them – the greatest example in history is discovering America. Indians were forced to get into contact with Europeans on their own land. Refugees are forced to leave their home country due to war, natural catastrophe etc. An appropriate example to the case in Estonia would be the time pre and during Second World War, where many Estonians fled the country due to oppression by the Soviet Union. Asylum seekers are similar to refugees, but they are usually ``passing`` the other country by. Voluntary contacts are in the groups of immigrants - people who want to live abroad for a longer time. Good examples with the Schengen countries where citizens of EU can live and work abroad.

This research paper concentrates on analyzing sojourners - the group where our Erasmus students and other voluntary short term people land - they come to live in another culture voluntarily. In all of these particular cases there are different political strategies or institutional solutions available. In the case of sojourners, since the immigration is mainly voluntary, there are no such strict regulations on the country level. The mobility and cultural contacts are rather regulated by bilateral contracts between universities or organized by country level. For example, in the case of EU, the Schengen contract, Erasmus programme, Bologna process etc. The integration to Tartu University depends on different levels of actions - the newcomers themselves, voluntaries, academic staff and structure and also the country.

According to Smith and Bond, it would be easier to regulate cultural contacts in the case where the immigration is rather voluntary, like in the case of taking an exchange year studying abroad rather than having to move due to necessary immigration from the areas of natural catastrophes. There are two levels of this kind of perception: countries and individuals. Countries and institutions can have a lot of ways for making newcomers feel welcomed but still the individuals could perceive the culture differently. It is acceptable that all people have their own opinion on immigrants and migration, thus the settlement country can have a general stand provided by government whether it is migration friendly or not. Hereby Smith and Bond (1999) suggest that the acculturation depends on the historical and attitudinal situation faced by both sides. Estonia's historical background is quite violent and the country has been occupied by many others - so it can be one of the reasons for not adopting.

In conclusion, various cultures might perceive the hosting country differently, also depending on the countries ways to welcome newcomers. The state strategies could be interpreted by individuals differently and the importance of individual adaptation strategies turn out to be important.

## 2 Cultural adaption and adoption

Another concept essential in the context of the thesis is adaptation and adoption. The inter- and transcultural reality, described more in detail in the previous sub chapter, is nowadays a potential challenge both for societies and individuals. The present research paper concentrates on the individual level – the adaptation of young people with different cultural backgrounds coming to study in Estonia.

In this thesis adaptation and adoption are defined throughout the cultural exchange process between an exchange student and a local person. Adaption in this case means the acculturation of the exchange student to the local life and getting to know Estonian culture, traditions and behavior. Adoption takes into consideration whether the local inhabitants of Tartu and other Estonian students accept foreigners to be part of the society. In both senses it is an acceptance of a new cultural context of the individual and also the society.

Smith and Bond (1999) explain *adoption* to be changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demand. The environmental demand for every arriving student changing their place of living to Tartu are the same - the conditions do not change that much over time, just the experiences (contacts with Estonians and perception of Estonian culture) of exchange students do. Smith and Bond (1999) have described three most valid factors on what the degree of cultural adaptation on the individual level is independent: mobility, voluntariness and permanence (see Table 1). For example, the author could presume that in the case of exchange students, since the cultural contact is voluntary, the students are supposed to be culturally more open and the cultural adaptation should be more painless. Still, all the groups must find a way to manage living in the new and different situation. According to Smith and Bond, despite the three levels of difference in life circumstances and despite the large variation in cultural groups that experience acculturation, there is evidence that essentially the process of acculturation is the same to all groups (Berry 1990).

Table 1 shows us the reasons but furthermore it is important to see the issues of how to acculturate.



*Table I: Voluntariness of contact and mobility of the foreigners by Smith and Bond. Voluntariness of contact is either voluntary (for immigrants and exchange students) and involuntary (for the hosts, refugees and asylum seekers)*

MOBILITY	VOLUNTAIRNESS OF CONTACT	
	Voluntary	Involuntary
Sedentary	Ethno-cultural Groups	Indigenous Peoples
Migrant Permanent temporary	Immigrants Sojourners	Refugees Asylum seekers

Taken into consideration the previous table our group of exchange students is also divided on other criteria. One of the most important criteria would be how newcomers choose their tactics to take the new culture into consideration.

Berry has provided a scheme of acculturation strategies in table 2. (Berry cited via Smith and Bond 1999: 306). The four strategies are as follows: integration where the newcomers want to blend in and still want to preserve their roots as well; assimilation is when the roots don't matter and the foreigners want to be like the hosting culture; separation wants to preserve the home culture without taking the new parts in; marginalization happens when neither the hosting nor the original culture are accepted or preserved. Where do the exchange students land on this scale? Generally the impression is that they want to integrate - they are open to the hosting culture but nonetheless they preserve their past identity as well.

The object of this research is to study the integration of the exchange students. According to Smith and Bond (1999: 306) ``integration can only be ``freely`` chosen and successfully pursued by non dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity. Thus a mutual accommodation is required for integration to be attained, involving the acceptance by both groups of the right of all groups to live as culturally different people``. Integration strategy requires mutual accommodation of both the minority and majority groups (Berry 1997b).

*Table II: The different acculturation strategies used by the people in the new culture room. The relationship between the hosting nation and the hosted person. There are four ways to acculturate in the new society - Integrate, assimilate, separate and marginalize.*

It is considered to be of value to maintain relationships with dominant society?	Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?	
	Yes	No
Yes	Integration	Assimilation
No	Separation	Marginalization

There are many factors that affect acculturation in which psychological and socio-cultural adaption are just a little part of it. Exchange students are put into situation where they must choose an acculturation strategy but also the society and other students around them need to choose a strategy.

In his article ``Culture and conflict`` Triandis (2000) expresses that some cultures interpret more information from body language than from the words and vice versa. Some people/cultures turn more attention to race, sex, religion, attitudes etc. than the others. These different perceivment issues might lead to serious conflicts between two sides. Gender, ethnicity, age, education, wealth and the like may form the basis for cultural adaptation or also form a stereotype. According to Segall a stereotype could function as an identifiable social marker (Segall 1999: 185) and in this way, stereotypes could help us to make up a mind about a relatively unknown subject. People make up stereotypes with the help of media, opinions of other people and society and experience they have had themselves. Besides that, stereotypes also help people to construct their self image and positive sense of self-esteem, but it might lead onto a socially destructive road if the differences of inner-group and outer-group are large (Segall 1999). Another term used in this context is ethnocentrism – favoritism of one in-group and rejection of the out-group`` (Levine and Campbell 1971: through Sagall 1999) the opposite of ethnocentrism is acceptance and diversity in tolerance.

Triandis (1994: 251-252) finds four main points to define cultural stereotype:

1. What goes on in our culture is seen as ``natural`` and ``correct``, and what goes on in other cultures is perceived as ``unnatural`` and ``incorrect``.
2. We perceive our own in-group customs as universally valid.
3. We unquestionably think that in-group norms, roles, and values are correct
4. We believe that it is natural to help and cooperate with members of our in-group, to favor our

in-group, to feel proud of our in-group and to be distrustful of and even hostile toward out-groups.

In the case of exchange students and also any kind of migrants it is important to understand both parties: the individuals in a destination society and mobile groups. In order to analyze the behavior of exchange students we need to see their personal background and the reasons for adapting the way they do.

In the present case, mostly the predecessor state and their institutions have had opportunity to express their opinion (in media etc). The present research is the first attempt to study the cultural adaptation as expressed by the exchange students coming to Tartu.

### **3 Cultural distances**

The third concept essential in the context of present thesis are cultural distances. Language, geographical distances, mentality, religion and beliefs, race – all these aspects make one culture differ from another but there are always some links that are similar to all human beings. Cultural distance is not only geographical or how close one knows the culture, but is rather a dimension that is the ground of inter- and transcultural communication.

There are different ways of how the cultural distances have been defined. In the present paper the author relies on the approaches by Hofstede where the concepts of cultural distances and cultural differences are seen as synonyms. This paper concentrates mostly on the definition of Geert Hofstede. In his book *Culture's consequences* he distinguishes five main characteristics, which compile ten synthesized cultures models that came up by thorough studies all around the world with many nations. The upcoming index numbers of the dimensions are taken from G. Hofstedes book *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the mind* 2005. Estonia's index is not measured straight but rather estimates or help of replications are used. In Hofstedes survey 74 countries or regions for witch the IBM research and its replications produced usable dimensions scores are studied.

Much of Estonia's landing in the chart is connected to the historical background of the country. Author can only make assumptions for reasons and examples why Estonia has these certain numbers in the chart.

**Masculinity versus femininity**, which is related to the division of emotional roles between men and women (Hofstede 2001: 29). According to Hofstede, masculine cultures are more target oriented and feminine cultures are more about equality, taking care for the weaker ones. Similar classification is used by Triandis (2000) but he calls this classification as Universalism-Particularism. In universalism cultures people try to treat others on the basis of universal criteria; in particularistic cultures people treat others on the basis of who the other person is.

A few years ago there was a bill of conduct where men and women equally could take three years off to raise the newborn child - this shows clearly that the standards of Nordic countries have been taken over, although there is still a long way to go for us in order to get the same numbers of percentage. Everyone is equal and in the author's opinion Estonia is moving towards becoming even more feminine, with all the handicapped facilities and women equality rights. Nowadays in the Estonian society it is normal that both men and women are equal partners in the family. When G. Hofstede visited Tartu (Lõhmus 2007) his remark was that Estonia is a very feminine country, that Tartu even has kissing students in the middle of the town hall square - no masculine country could afford it as it is a symbol of equality. On the other hand this dimension is quite contradicting - men are still dominating in most leading positions and also in politics the status of women is lower. According to the Hofstede's chart maximum and minimum index are as follows: Slovakia 110, Estonia 30, Sweden 5. The closest to our students is Russia and the furthest in this dimension is Japan with 95 and Italy/Mexico with 70. Japan is a very traditional and masculine country and Sweden is rather feminine with the socialists being in power. Estonia has almost the same results as Russia, which could indicate to our historical heritage.

**Individualism versus collectivist**, which is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups (Hofstede 2001:29). People from the individual countries stand for themselves and in collective countries it is about the team - if one does badly then the whole team feels bad. Stephan, Stephan, and de Vargas (cited via Triandis 1994) tested a hypothesis where they claimed that people of collectivist cultures have more trouble expressing their feelings, whereas individual cultures could express their emotions much more freely- this hypothesis occurred to have been true.

Because all humans are parts of social entities (families, clans, ethnic groups, societies, etc.), it is universally true that we are all individuals within collectives (Segall 1999: 206), thus to feel individual one must be part of a group. In 1991 Hofstede stated "Individualism stands for a society in

which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only, `` and ``collectivist stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in the exchange for unquestioning loyalty`` (Hofstede 1991: 260-261).

Triandis studies this dimension as well, but he divides individualism and collectivism into two poles. He studied collectivists individually in several countries and compared them to each other. Collectivist American students were found to be low on anomie, alienation and loneliness- students consider to receive greater social support of better quality and value cooperation, equality and honesty the most. Individual students on the other hand value a comfortable life, competition, pleasure and social recognition (Segall on Triandis, Villereal, Leung and Clack: 1985)

Estonia tends to move from a collectivistic nation towards the individualistic over time. Decades ago there were many large soviet factories all around the country and within these factories the collectivist behavior got stronger and stronger but this was not a natural habitat for Estonians and once the regime fell the Estonians could return to their individualistic lifestyle. On Hofstedes chart: USA with 91, Estonia 60 and Guatemala 6. The closest to our students is the Czech Republic and the furthest on one side is the U.S.A. and on the other side Mexico with 30. Other studies have revealed similar results, for example the studies of Realo (2002) have shown that the Estonian culture could be both seen as individualistic as well as collectivistic, depending on particular focus.

**Long-term versus short-term orientation**, which is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present (Hofstede 2001: 29) Cultures who consider making their community more prosperous in far future, who think about the environment and who concentrate not only on growing fast but growing steadily, are considered to be long term visionists. The opposite to this are the short term visionists who live it up for the moment, for example individuals often take loans and live over their capacity.

Estonia, taken into consideration what has been going on in the economy of the country over the past few years, is a rather short term oriented country. On the other hand, Estonians value their nature and try to preserve the forest, lakes and moors of the land. At times they wish to have quick results and fast growth in economy. Estonians have a lot of respect towards their traditions, rather than respect for circumstances. Less people get married nowadays as it is not considered to be a pragmatic arrangement anymore. Living with in-laws is mostly taken as a source of trouble rather than a normal situation (as it

used to be before). According to Hofstede's dimension index: China 118, Finland 41, Pakistan 0. Furthest is Japan with 80 and Czech with 13 and closest Netherlands. As there is no data on Estonia in this dimension, the author takes the example of Finland as it has proved to be the closest to Estonia in other dimensions as well.

**Power distance**, which is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality (Hofstede 2001: 29). The leader knows best and is strong acting like he wants; no one will dispute or argue with the leader. The big power distance index shows nation to be very dependent from the leader. The contrary to that is society where everyone is equal - leaders ask opinions of the team. Triandis has called this dimension as vertical-horizontal culture division. Vertical cultures accept hierarchy as given. People are different from each other. Hierarchy is a natural state (Triandis 1994).

According to Hofstede: Malaysia 104, Estonia 40 and Austria 11. Closest/furthest from our interviewees are the USA with the same points, Holland with two less and the furthest is Russia with 93 and from the other side Sweden with 31. Estonians see that all should have equal rights - the boss does not overrule the workers and asks for their opinion, which is not seen as a weak point. Estonia lands in the middle as it holds both characteristics but it is moving towards the smaller power distance as it used to have major gaps between employers and employees, which is now changing over the course of time. It is relevant to notice that Russia still has a high power distance index, which means that they believe that whoever holds the power is correct and good, whereas in small power distance countries the use of power has to be legitimate and follow the rules of good and evil. This PDI (power distance index) number might also be a heritage from the soviet times, where the regime was controlling different fields of life but yet the Estonians found ways how to manage those strategies: writers wrote postings, books and stories with double meanings; also knowing the right people in order to exchange products that were needed was necessary etc. - this might also explain why the PDI is so different from Russia's PDI as this kind of double moral led to easier ways of change after the regime fell.

**Uncertainty avoidance**, which is related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future (Hofstede 2001: 29). This distance indicates to what extent a culture programs its members, for them to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unusual moments. Countries with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance are where the leading body represses opinion of the masses, media might be censored and mostly only one truth is taken as the right one. Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty

avoidance is similar to tightness of the culture in the classification made by Triandis. Tight cultures have many rules, norms and ideas about what is considered to be a correct behavior in each situation; loose cultures have fewer rules and norms. Tightness is more likely to occur when the culture is relatively isolated from other cultures so that consensus about what is proper behavior can develop. It is also more likely that tightness will occur in situations where people are highly independent and where there is a high population density (Triandis 2000).

According to Hofstede's five dimension chart index: Greece 112, Estonia 60 and Singapore 8. The closest to Estonia from our exchange students' countries is Netherlands and the furthest is Russia with 95 and Sweden with 29.

Again Estonia lands in the middle of this dimension. The curiosity and anxiety is rather taken as a normal state of mind not being afraid of it or longing for it. Rules are written only if needed and there is no emotional need for rules. More and more the attitude of Estonians is moving towards "time is money" attitude. Estonia really does not lean towards either side here - the key differences in family life, education and citizenship and state life show no preference. Netherlands is the closest in this dimension and the reasons for that are clear - both nations are curious, but not too cautious about it, there is a positive attitude towards young people, tolerance and innovation of different ideas and happenings.

Triandis (2000) also brings out some other dimensions that at some point match with the previous dimension, but nonetheless are not the same. Some cultures are more complex than the others - for example African rain forests hide tribes that work on simple structures and another example would be an information society, where the complexity of the culture is very high. This is also represented in TU exchange student dormitories - many cultures live together creating a true "multi" society in any sense: -lingual, -cultural, -racial, -colored.

Some studies have researched cultural contacts and distances both on societal and individual level. For example Peeter Vihalemm has distinguished four different spheres in international social space: 1. political, 2. economical, 3. cultural, 4. personal space. The three first can be monitored as social (institutional) space and the last one as the personal contact or imagination and preference space (Vihalemm 2004: 75). The present research paper concentrates on analyzing personal cultural contacts and personal cultural distances and their role in the process of individual cultural adaptation of exchange students.

Five different cultural dimensions were introduced and on the base of these dimensions the

particular cultural differences or distances will be observed and analyzed. The author could summarize the dimensions of Hofstede in the following way- if we know who is opposing us and who we are not then we can state who we are. The empirical focus of this study are the different backgrounds of exchange student cultures that come out on a different font - all exchange students are put into a similar situation as they arrive, nevertheless some adopt better than others. The reason behind it could be the different ways how Estonian culture is perceived, depending on the difference from the native culture and personal experience before arrival, along with the various cultural dimensions described above. The perception depends greatly on the media back home and personal mobility – whether the student has lived abroad before or is Estonia the first time they go to a foreign country.

The aim of the present thesis is to find out how the exchange students perceive Estonians in the manners of these quantitative numbers. Cultural distances on the country level are taken as the readiness of the country to take in immigrants and the use of different policies to encourage or discourage the flow of people into Estonia. The present research paper includes the second level-organizations. Tartu University is a large institution with academic staff, professional network for incoming students and voluntaries working for the exchange students. The individual level and the individual perception of the cultural distances vary largely depending on the persons and these distances might be largely influenced by the organizational and country level. Having developed the general idea of theory so far, the author would now like to append some supplemental precise examples of our case based on statistical overviews.

## **4 Empirical background**

In the following chapter an overview of the exchange students in general and also statistics about students in Tartu is given. The number of students studying abroad grows every year - In 2006 there was an ESN Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Krakow with the subname ``Generation Mobility``: this name is the best description for European youth today. `` Without roots, without barriers, without prejudices. Mobile. Multilingual. Open and Dynamic. `` - this slogan was used to promote the meeting and the people of this generation and Erasmus programme.

Universities, companies and countries need to start looking for different possibilities for using the globalization for their own best use. As the borders are opened and there are exchange programmes



like Erasmus, it becomes easier and more common to exchange country and university for a semester or two or maybe even for a longer time. Today the universities are becoming more and more diverse – a few decades ago people could not even imagine that there would be other classifications as gender and class, but now also race, native language, sexual orientation, religions, and mental capacity play a big role. Tartu University is also becoming more open in terms of mobility, whereas some decades ago, when the borders were closed, it was a real exception to have a chance to study abroad - now it is just a normal part of a student's time.

## **4.1 Estonia and cultural distances**

In this chapter the empirical background of Estonian's cultural distances and the dimensions of what cultures are closer and which ones are further to Estonia are shown.

Estonia has always been a country whose people were occupied and the land was owned by foreigners. Over the centuries Estonia has had rulers from Denmark, Sweden, Russia and Germany. After I WW all three Baltic countries gained independence and during this time the local culture and patriotism developed. After the Second WW all the Baltic countries were occupied by the Soviet power for some decades. During this era a large group of Russian workers came to live in Estonia and after regaining the independence this minority still remains the largest. This minority lives in the North-Eastern part of Estonia and in larger cities (Rauch 1986). Having a large minority from a suppressing nation is still affecting the everyday life of Estonians - both Estonians and Estonian-Russians need to learn both languages. The past totalitarian regime has caused a situation where the local people are still careful with their cultural behaviour and contacts they use.

On the other hand the ruling powers did not always prove to be a negative influence; for example there is an era called the ``golden Swedish era`` where slavery was abolished and among many other important matters Tartu University was established. The geographical and cultural closeness with the Nordic countries allows the author to make an assumption that the cultural distances with those countries are smaller.

In an interview given in 2007, Geert Hofstede claims that there have not been many changes since the fall of the regime in Estonia and that the culture type has not changed significantly. In the totalitarian regime the Estonians could not open their culture type that much, it was oppressed by the ideology but

now it functions normally.

Taking into consideration the fact of Estonians having to cope with many foreign powers, it makes more sense why in some terms it is harder for them to accept and adapt exchange students into the student's society.

Generally, Estonians are quite similar to Finnish people; the outcome does not vary that much with Nordic countries in general. This leads me to an assumption that the exchange students from Nordic countries adopt here easily and vice versa. There are many Finns studying in TU, so it will be practical and possible to study their view regarding Estonia.

Last year the 20 years anniversary of Erasmus programme was celebrated all over Europe and this year is a special year for Estonia as the first exchange students went out of Estonia ten years ago. That means Estonia has a ten year experience of sending out and hosting students from other countries. Let's have a look of the statistics for the Estonian part, regarding the perception of cultural distances.

The closest cultures to Estonians according to Mina. Maailm. Meedia (Mi.Ma.Me), Estonian media research conducted in 2004, are Finnish, German, Russian, UK, USA and Swedish, whereas the Russians living in Estonia thought the closest cultures to be Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and German. But the contrast to the current situation in Estonia, with immigrants and attitude towards migration, is quite negative compared to other EU countries. Luxembourg, Slovenia, Greece, Estonia, France, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Hungary and Portugal - a group that has a lower than average EU country readiness to accept immigration – their numbers show that former Communist block and colonial countries are generally not that positive towards migration (Masso 2008).

Interest of the news from top three countries has remained the same within 1991, 1994 and 2003, these news are from Russia, Finland and Sweden/Latvia/Germany (three countries are marked as one due to very little change within those years). In comparison of different age groups the importance of American culture to Estonian youth has grown. The age group of 15-19 year old answered that the country of most interested news are from USA. The Mi.Ma.Me 2003 research shows that most the countries most visited by Estonian are Russia (28%) Latvia (17%) and Finland (12%).

In Hille Pajupuu's research on ``Estonian national stereotypes in transition``, there are some outcomes that are used in given research as well. It is proven that before Estonians had direct contact to Finnish people the image of Finns was very positive. The moment that the borders opened and contact with Finns became more and more common, also the image of Finns went down - Estonians now saw Finns rather as a negative issue. The research was conducted in three rounds: 91/92 ; 96/97

and 2002-2004.'' In the first round of the survey, out of the ten most offered properties, nine carried positive connotations. However, in the second round, the picture changed: out of ten properties, nine carried a negative connotation. In the third round of the survey, properties with a positive connotation were prevalent once again: six out of ten'' (Pajupuu 2005). Thus the stereotype of Finns in the eyes of Estonians right now is rather positive. Does the same system imply on our exchange students - do they firstly get the positive than the negative image and at last again obtain the positive perception? ''When people come into contact with members of other cultures they are often not aware of their miscommunications because they think that the others are more or less like they are. This is the stage of *unconscious incompetence*. After some interpersonal difficulties people realize that they are miscommunicating but they do not know exactly what is wrong. That is the stage of *conscious incompetence*. As they get to know more and more about the culture of the other, they begin communicating correctly but they have to make an effort to communicate in a different way. That is the stage of *conscious competence*. Finally, after they develop habits of correct communication with members of the other culture, they reach the stage of *unconscious competence*, where the communication is effortless, and correct''(Triandis 2000). This all will be studied in the final paper through the quantitative interview of the exchange students.

In the empirical study the aspects of how the exchange students perceive Estonian culture and what are their opinions of Estonians will be studied. Representatives of different cultures will have a different opinion of Estonia as the exchange students have not seen what was going on in this country decades ago.

In the West people see ''uniqueness'' as desirable, whereas in East Asia it is often seen as ''deviance'', in the West ''conformity'' is sometimes seen as undesirable, but in the East Asia it is seen as a ''harmony'' (Kim and Markus cited via Triandis 2000).

## **4.2 Exchange students in Tartu**

University of Tartu was established in 1632 by the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf. It is a classical university that has ten faculties: the Faculty of Social Science, Medicine, Law, Mathematics, Economics, Theology etc. University of Tartu is a member of Coimbra group, which is a network of 38 universities around Europe.

The first exchange students arrived in TU in 1988/1989 and there were seven of them, making the total number 23 in one year. The number has been growing steadily and in 1998/1999 it reached its peak with 388 exchange students. For a few years the number was decreasing and increasing in very small numbers but ever since 2003/2004 the numbers have only grown. In the fall semester of 2008 there were 521 exchange students studying in TU. (Üldine võrdlus...2009) What is also important is that the number of MA and PhD students is increasing steadily - that means many students have decided to stay here to obtain their degree here.

In the spring semester of 2007/2008 TU had 481 exchange students and in the spring semester of 2006/2007 TU had 459 exchange students. Those numbers show that the increase is constant and the table below shows the numbers more precisely.

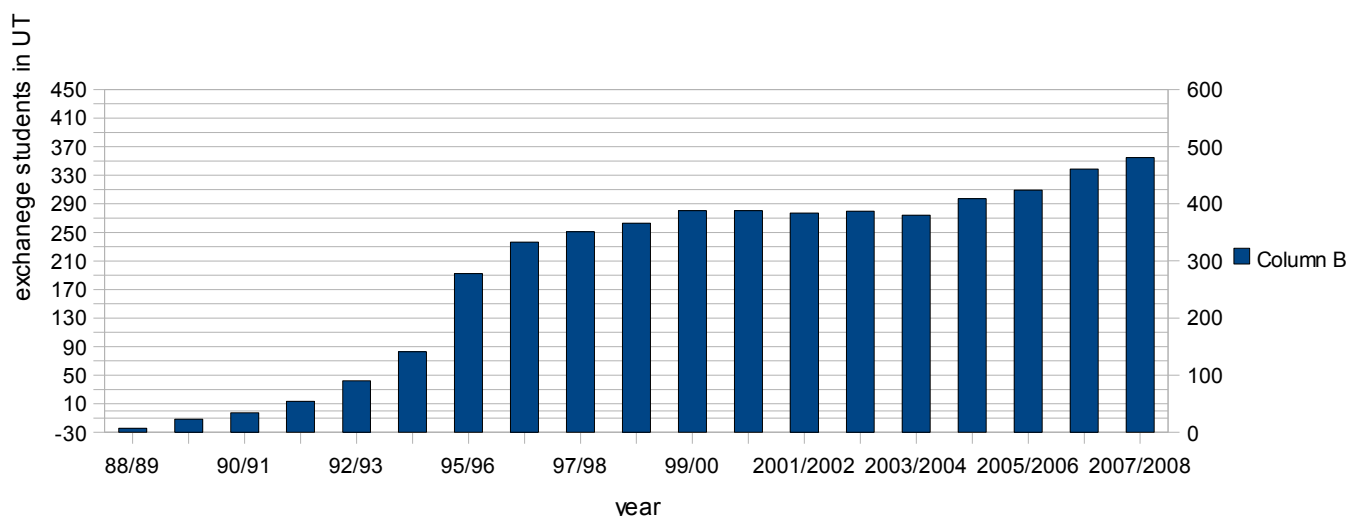


Figure I: The number of exchange students on spring semesters of years 88/89-07/08 (source: UT database, 2008)

In the year 2006/2007 the total number of foreigners studying in TU was 586 which makes about 3% of all the students (18 238). Faculty wise, most of the students study in the faculties of Medicine, Philosophy and Social Science - that is mainly connected to the fact that these faculties have an English curriculum. This situation might improve as the preliminary documents state that since the demographical situation in Estonia is not that positive, then TU-s target is to have 10% of the exchange students. There are also plans to establish more English curriculums.

Preliminary plan of TU from 2008-2015 states clearly that TU will continue to develop

international liaisons with other universities and will try to get scholars and students from different countries. (A2015) Three out of five strategical statements for the year 2015 use the word ``international ``. That shows that TU is taking it rather seriously to make the university more known on the international level and to attract international partners and students.

Last semester (2008/2009 fall) 280 international students were accepted in TU and were divided into:

Bachelors' degree 39

Masters 33

PhD 14

Additional training course 2

Erasmus program 105

Bilateral agreements between universities 45

No agreements 42

Total 280

The most popular faculties were Philosophy, Nature and Technology, Social Science. 86 students intended obtaining their degree in TU. 39 international students making BA, 33 MA and 14 PhD, these three categories are divided into government sponsored places and self paid places- in BA and MA the division is almost half-half, in PhD only one person is paying for the studies him/herself. Students from 28 different countries are bond to get a degree in TU. 30 students from Finland, 15 from Russia, six from Lithuania, five from USA and the other countries are represented with one or two students. The most exotic countries represented are Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Cameron etc.

The University of Tartu has signed several bilateral agreements with other universities. This year representatives from these universities were studying here: University of Hamburg, Baptist University of Hong Kong, University of Kiel, University of Latvia, Medical University of Lübeck, University of Tampere, State University of Tbilisi, University of Turku, University of Waseda, University of Voronez. In total 27 students arrived here through bilateral agreements.

105 students came to TU through the Erasmus programme, one person through Fulbright, three with ISEP, five with state funds and 51 with other sources than previously listed. In total 32 nationalities are represented within these 192 students. The countries most represented are Germany with 28 students, Poland with 19, Finland with 18, USA with 13, Italy with 12, and Turkey with 11 students.

The one big problem that the university is facing now is that there are a lot of Estonian students who wish to study in Spain, Italy and France but those countries are very popular destinations all over Europe. The issue is that not many exchange students from those destination countries come to study in Tartu, thus there are also not enough places to give out to those countries.

ESN has received different feedback about the living conditions - mostly internationals complain about not integrating with the Estonian students but on the other hand they like having a truly international spirit on the floor. Many exchange students have pointed out that the staff of the dormitory is hostile and doesn't speak English. The most negative feedback about the living facilities comes from scholars and PHD students, who have come to Tartu to work/study for longer period of time (Archimedes 2007).

In the context of the present research paper the difference of cultures appears in the moment that another culture is met and compared to. In the dormitory of exchange students they are mostly granted a room on the fourth floor, where many different cultures and nationalities meet. Most communication is done verbally as the distances are really small (from room to room). More and more exchange students use Facebook for communication between each other during and after their exchange period (ESN Survey 2007).

## II Research questions and research method

### 1. Research questions

Research questions are linked to the information given above about the exchange students and also the theoretical overview:

1. What are the knowledges about Estonia and Estonians prior arrival?
2. How are the cultural distances perceived?
  - 2.1. Do the countries geographically closer perceive Estonians more positively than geographically further cultures?

Members of different cultures sample with diverse probabilities different kinds of information from their environment (Triandis 1994) thus, closer cultures have to adopt with less ``strange`` situations.

- 2.2. How does the stereotype of Estonia and Estonians change during their stay here?

Exchange students are an interesting case as they are not just tourist in the country, rather they get to know Estonia more profoundly and in a very interactive longer-term way. After the first culture shock period, when the true problems and differences occur exchange students start perceiving more realistic vibes of Estonia.

As outcome of Pajupuus research: people tend to think positive of the unknown. Then after getting to know new culture and seeing that not all have the same mentality and that cultures are different the image goes down because mostly all new is not taken with positive connotations. Later when people can adopt to both the old and new way of seeing things also the image goes to rather positive one. Does this apply to exchange students in foreign country.

- 2.3. How much contact to Estonians do exchange students get? Do International students want to have more contact to Estonians and do they want to know Estonian culture better?

This point comes from the fact how ``isolated`` exchange students are in Tartu. They live in one dormitory, mostly on one floor. There are special curricula for only exchange students. Most of their lectures take place in one building (Lossi 3). This question will be proven right or wrong on the basis of the interviews conducted after few months of staying here.

- 2.4. On G. Hofstede's chart where would the individuals place Estonia compared to their own

country and based on their own experience?

3. What adaptation strategies are used?

3.1. How efficient is TU using its channels to promote the university and student life, what channels the exchange students used to find out about Estonia /TU?

3.2. What acculturation strategies do the individuals use? How much contact to Estonians do exchange students get? What does the amount of having Estonian friends and Estonian contacts depend from?

## 2 Research method

In order to get answers to the research questions the present thesis uses qualitative methodology as a basis and the strategic sample technique (Trost 1986) instead of probability sample ordinarily in the field of formalized survey research.

Qualitative interview with 10 exchange students who live and study in Tartu are interviewed on semi- structured questionnaire.

Qualitative interview gives the best overview of the case. Quality and details are important to know and also the cultural font behind the stories are relevant, it gets a specific insight into the questions not generalization about it. Quantitative method would not give sufficient information about the cultural differences and Tartu University has a questionnaire for exchange students once they leave Tartu, those results do not give the background of the problems and are too little to make an analysis on this subject. The interview plans are in the appendix.

The semi-structured method was used for the interviews. According to this method, the general questions were similar in different interviews, still the order and formulation of questions were free. Besides, additional questions were asked when it was necessary in the interview situation to encourage the students or to get a better overview of the background or more examples.

There were four main topics supported by several smaller questions about comparison of their home country, similarities/difference , problems in making contact with Estonians students, living and studding conditions in university of Tartu, closer and further cultures, best and worst moments in Estonia etc. These subjects are easy to answer and give a good idea of the person and the culture background in order to understand and analyze them better. Semistructured interview method creates



comfortable atmosphere and the answers give more information also about the background and story behind the experience. Open questions are used first in order to get the informant into the subject, after that directing questions give more ideas how to approach the open questions (see interview plan in appendix). When formulating the interview schedule, some questions from Hofstede's cultural dimensions questionnaire in order to get a better overview on Estonians will be added. For interview questions see appendix. The interview is conducted in English as it is either first foreign language or mother tongue to the informants and also the author- this situation creates an equal position between the author and the exchange students, also in the interpreting part the author takes into consideration that sometimes body language says more than words.

In present thesis ten exchange students from all over the world were interviewed between 25.01.09-14.04.09. 9 out of 10 had been in Estonia for just few months. According to strategic sample technique, the interviewees were chosen on two criteria- hetero and homogeneous. The Homogeneous criteria applied that exchange students were studying in Tartu University, they knew English on intermediate level. And on heterogeneous grounds the country of origin. On the base of former studies (see theories of Huntington) the civilization one belongs to plays an important role defining one's cultural preferences. In my thesis, not all Huntingtons civilizations (see theory of present paper) were present, so the others nationalities were picked from Europe and the connection, historical and geographical, to Estonia was considered. For example a country from the former soviet block, one from Scandinavia and so on (see table 1). Most of the students are Bachelor or Master degree students, whose age is under 27 years. In different countries the ages and traditions to go abroad are different, some universities require BA level students to have an exchange semester and in some one can only go abroad in MA level. The majors of all students are quite various, but about half of them are somehow connected to international relations within countries and the stay here gets also practical experience for students.

Expert interview will be conducted with two experts: the officer of International student office of Tartu University- Annika Kalda; and ESN Tartu president- Veeli Oeslg. The expert interviews are scheduled after analysing the qualitative interviews. Experts opinions on same subjects is mainly brought out in improvement issues part of the thesis.

## 2.1. Data analysis

The analysis forms using two methods- cross case and case-by-case. First the questions answers are compared to each other subject by subject and secondly every person is analyzed separately. Two methods are put together in a mixture that gives the answers.

One question often did not give the most wanted information so many other smaller questions about the same topic were analyzed within this one bigger question. The quote of the person comes right after the analysis and is mostly about, if not marked differently, the same person. Researcher is of the opinion that the idea of signing the source most of the time with the first name is a good way, as we get to know the person better, the connections come along with the information given and is relevant on the front of their nationality and culture. The source is signed by just the first name, so table 4. gives you overview of the name and the person behind it.

The confidentiality of the students and answers are guaranteed by the author. The author guarantees the confidentiality of the students and in some cases anonymity was requested and given.

The interviews are not anonymous as it is always a possibility for Tartu University to use their data base and find out who is the person giving the answers, but on the other hand the students have already left by the time of the release of the paper and they were notified about this during the interview.

Researches own experience and notes on this subject are used to comment on some things and by using the grounded theory methods (Corbin and Strauss 1990) grounded theory is used during interviews when the researcher has more information on a subject than the informant is giving out and also during the analysis of the interviews.

## 2.2 The interviewees

All students are of the same nationality with their country. Following table shows the main information about the interviewees. In order to read the analysis better the author suggest to look at this table carefully.

*Table IV. Sample structure of the interview*

<b>No</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Study what?</b>
1	Chriss	USA	22	International business
2	Ali	Turkey	21	International relations
3	Carlos	Mexico	20	Law
4	Daigo	Japan	27	Economics
5	Katja	Russia	20	Ancient History
6	Niels	Holland	22	International communications
7	Petr	Czech republic	21	Sports management
8	Sofia	Sweden	21	Business administration
9	Thomas	Italy	25	Statistics
10	Tiko	Georgia	19	International relations

All of them study in Tartu University and are here on one of the exchange programme, mostly Erasmus or bilateral agreements between universities. The age varies from 19- 27 and the female and male balance is almost half half. 6 boys and 4 girls. By the moment of the interview all students had been in Estonia for more than one and half months so already familiar with the life and possibilities here.

The interviews were taken in English as it was for all a second or at least a third learned language, also for the interviewer and the level of English was mostly above average. Two students were not as good, but their expression skills were better and the answers that they wished to say did not suffer. The knowledge of foreign languages and level of English is described in chapter 3 under adaption and adaption.

### **III Analysis of Interviews**

#### **1. Prior contact, knowledge and arrival**

##### **1.1 Reasons to have chosen Estonia, other choice to go where**

The reasons to have chosen Estonia are different- some knew from before deciding to have exchange that it is going to be Estonia and some just had a chance to do exchange here.

Almost all interviewees said that they expected Estonia to be something different than usual old Europe like Germany or France. Estonia offers a chance to get a different experience, as it used to be a soviet country and now its a fast developing EU country.

Researcher divided the interviewees into three groups: Estonia as first or only choice, in between and exchange anywhere. In between students are labeled so if they wanted to go somewhere else, but were refused and then chose Tartu.

##### \* Estonia as first /only choice

Sofia knew from the start that she is going to come to study in Tartu, it was a natural follow up, as she has a grandparent who is Estonian and she learned in Estonian high school for 9 years. Her second choice was Tallinn and third Riga.

Also for Thomas it was clear from the start that it is going to be Tartu University, he wanted a special abroad experience. He and his friend are also the first ones from their university to be in Tartu University. For Thomas it was Tartu or nothing, it was his unique choice.

Thomas, Nielss, Carlos and Chriss claim to be the first ones ever from their university to have come study in Estonia.

Chriss knew he wanted to do exchange in Estonia before he even went to university in USA. His university is one of the five universities who have exchange programme with Tartu. He also had a lot of contacts with Estonians even years before his arrival here. The reason he got interested in Estonia is that its a part of Europe that is not that well known, also post soviet country and now a new developing country. He wanted to experience the untold, not like Spain, Germany or Italy.

*I have actually been in contact with Estonian with Estonian for two three years. Bout three years ago I*

*got interested in Baltic countries, one reason in particular was that its and area of Europe that is not that known. Post soviet union so it was an new developing country. As an exchange student I wanted to get is a different place to go, you know, not like Italy or France, Germany, I wanted to experience the untold. I'm the first from my university to come here on exchange (Chriss, M22, USA)*

Daigo got strong influence by an Estonian professor whose speech he had heard completely accidentally back in Japan. The professor spoke about Estonia and he did it in fluent Japanese. After the speech they had lunch and the professor encouraged Daigo to come study in Tallinn. After his exchange year in Tallinn he started his PhD in Japan and in 6 months he returned to Tartu because he had liked it so much, and he has Estonian friends here.

*It's kind of accident. First, as I told you, I'm looking for a opportunity and that time my university has a kind of bilateral agreement with Tallinn university. And there is a conference where one professor come from Tallinn university and gave a speech about what is Estonia. What country is. And he spoke in Japanese. I happened to be there, just out of curiosity /--/The head of Tallinn university now. He is a first Estonian who translated Japanese language. He perfectly speaks Japanese and we went to have a dinner together after conference and he encouraged me to come to Estonia. That's the only reason (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Other person who was influenced by a second party was Ali - his close friend who had been here a year ago told him about Tartu. Ali had interest in Baltic states and he wondered how a former soviet country can progress that quickly. His friend had told him about how people knew how to drink and party here. One big influential reason was also the botanical gardens in Tartu.

*I always wanted to get to know how is to be former occupant . After the change, I always wondered how a small country, well it's a good advantage, but still you just wonder how can a small country progress that quick, because you see on the news and they tell you that it's a really developed country /--/So picked Tartu and one of my friends used to study here and he told me that people know how to drink, how to have fun and /---/ stuff is good, the only thing that kind of troubled my mind was the weather, you know I am Turkish, but yeah...basically (Ali, M21, Turkey)*

\* in between

Nielss had already had abroad experience in USA and Suriname so he decided to have and exchange in Europe this time. His first choice was Sweden, but they offered MA courses and as he is BA he decided to have his exchange in Tartu. His second choice was Prague, then Texas, Arizona and Istanbul.

\*wish to do exchange

Tiko had never really considered of going to Estonia, but there was a competition announced in Tbilisi university and she won it. Also she had some contacts with Estonians who arrived to Tbilisi to travel around. She was interested about the former soviet country that now is in a new alliance and how fast it has developed. Her Georgian friends, who had been here before told her it was a good idea to have an exchange in Tartu. Her other choice would have been Germany.

*I say, one of factors was that I always wanted to go somewhere abroad to study, coz I don't really like to be always in same situation. I like to change place where I live, so I and hum, one of my good suggestions for me was Estonia coz we, there are really good conditions, /--/So my parents told me that it would be really nice to, I don't know but, I have never thought about it probable because it was also member of soviet union as Georgia, ayah. but now Estonia is the member of the European union and when I come here its really more developed than Georgia and I thought that it would be really good for me if I could come here. (Tiko, F19, Georgia)*

For Petr it was a practical obstacle, why he came here, he decided to have exchange quite late and TU was the only university that could still accept him. He also applied to Italy and Jyväskylä.

## **1.2Estonia and first impressions**

### **1.2.1Fears and emotions before arrival**

Chriss, Ali, Sofia, Tiko were very excited before their arrival and most of exchange students claimed to have had no fears before arrival

Petr had no time for emotions, as he had really little time between when he knew he was coming and to the moment he came. He also didn't have time to worry before, but later he was worried that his car would not make the journey from Czech Republic to Estonia, his car is really old and he did not want to take the bus as he would have arrived in the middle of the night to Tartu.

Daigo, Tiko and Carlos were concerned if people on Estonia would speak English and what to do if they wont be understood. Tiko and Katja were concerned about the courses being thought in English, they were not sure if can understand the materials, but after the courses started they both were more confident. Tiko was afraid if it was a right decision to come study here and also to be so far from home for 5 months. Daigo was also concerned about living so far from home, he had never done it before and he was very worried about the language barrier.

Carlos knew he might have problems at the customs with the residence permit and visa so he was very scared and also he was scared that people won't talk English in Estonia.

*I was first really excited and later problems with migration came- I got worried that whole trip I was scared. In the airport I was scared that they will send me back. In Amsterdam they told me that I need to leave before July.*

*/--/ The problem was my suitcases, they were heavy. The next day all the people on tram don't speak English. I said bus station and no one understood. Then the bus driver told me to get off, and I arrived to bus station. I thought I got bad luck, most young people speak English, but then it was only old people there and no one really wanted to help me to explain. ( Carlos, M20, Mexico)*

Ali and Sofia were concerned about the cold. Ali was afraid of the skin-heads and AIDS. He was also told that he would have such good time here that it would be hard to go back to normal life in Turkey.

*They told me about the skin heads- group of people who would actually recognize that I'm not actually Estonian and I would have troubles. That did. And to be honest I heard about the AIDS and stuff, it was one of the things that I heard about Estonia. It comes from Russia. People told me that be careful you might get AIDS. That sounds ridiculous, but to be honest I heard that. /--/You know this term Homo Erasmus, right? I was afraid that if I become too much Homo Erasmus I would actually cut my connections with my academic studies and get used to it, and when I'm back to Turkey and then I am oblivious about studies and go party every day, and that was like this can be a different experience that will change my personality. (Ali, M21, Turkey)*

### **1.2.2 First impressions and experience**

Orientation day was considered to be very usefully place to get new contacts and to get general overview of the system and university. Orientation left an impression of a very organized and friendly environment in general about the University.

The fact that there is Wireless Internet everywhere was astonishing fact for Niels, who hadn't experienced it to that extent before, even having it on buses and trains and parks.

Carlos thought the airport was really small. Tallinn was clean and very quiet and full of snow.

Daigo was fascinated by the different architecture, Gothic style and everything being built with stone. The big churches were also unusual for him.

Petr was surprised by the roads and also for the fact that his car actually made the entire journey from Prague. He arrived on a very nice, cold and snowy day. He noticed a lot of sculptures in Tartu and he said that Tartu seemed to be a very nice city.

Tiko first landed with 4 other Georgians in Riga and they had to stay in the airport for the night. They

did not have Latvian money and they didn't know that they can pay in Euros so they were not allowed on the bus at first. When she first arrived to Tartu she didn't find it to be as small as everyone had been telling her. Some Georgians came to pick them up from the bus station.

*In Latvia we discovered that we have to wait 12 hours for the bus, that was really really bad, but when we finally arrived to Tartu my first emotions was that its not that small as I thought , its really big. because I thought that it was really really small (before arrival). As it was, I don't know why, I know its the second largest. everyone told me its so small and lovely town. /---/ (Tiko, F19, Georgia)*

Sofia had been to Tallinn before but one of the first things she noticed in Tartu was the nice Kaubamaja and Tasku how fancy they were and that few hundred meters away there were houses that weren't that nice at all. The big difference and not equality between things. This remark is a clear connection to Hofstede's dimension of masculinity-femininity, in this sub chapter many dimensions come out.

Chriss brought out door knobs to be different in USA and also that some things were much slower here- the mall doors open slower.

*The first thing I noticed not a major thing, I noticed that the door handles are not actual handles just these knobs, you know the small things like that.*

*Funny story was also when I went to this shopping center when I ran into the door coz the open faster in the states. (Chriss, M 22, USA)*

When Ali first landed in Riga and took his first breath he thought he was not going to survive 5 months in Baltic and wanted to fly back immediately. Ali was sick when he first arrived- he had an ear infection and he didn't get better until much later. When he first arrived to Tartu he saw McDonald's, Swed bank, Airbaltic etc, so he was relieved that Tartu wasn't as soviet as he had thought at first.

First things that were noticed were the ones that strike as different from back home and that were also kind of practical subject like the weather or doors. No one noticed something really positive or extremely negative, students were full of curiosity at that time. It is probable harder for Daigo to remember his first thought as his first time in Estonia was one and half year ago, so he talked about more abstract things like the architecture.



### 1.2.3 First impressions with Estonians

This topic is divided between how much students knew before arrival about Estonian students.

#### \* Nothing to little

Carlos, Petr, Tiko knew nothing about Estonians before they got here.

Niels said he didn't know much, just about the shyness and reservedness. He also thought that this idea of east Europeans being conservative and shy is a general idea the west has of them.

*I didn't know a lot, the only thing you hear is like they are reserved, shy and ...I think thats ...the attitude that many western Europeans have towards eastern Europeans that they are very conservative and or at least shy. (Niels, M22, Holland)*

#### \* Knew some

Ali's image was different from others- he had an idea that Estonians are cold and reserved, bit distant.. He mentioned nationalism and being in love with one's country and that it's a good thing to some extent. Ali got his information from his friend who had already been on exchange here.

*Okay basically...hum.. this is difficult..I heard they would be cold...cold blooded...a bit distant...Ohm.. I knew that they had this sweet nationality. Of course don't get me wrong though it's not a bad thing keeping their language under the occupation of the soviets, and living your culture is something really big and good and I wish every country had this without problems. And I thought Estonia and I still think that they have this. And maybe nationalism is about... it may sound bad, but it's this being in love with your country, which is normal and really cool. So I knew that and I think it's not wrong. (Ali, M21, Turkey)*

Katja thought Estonia's would be slow and not very hospitable at least not compared to Russians.

#### \* Personal contacts before arrival

Chriss had a better idea about Estonians as he had been in close virtual contact with some of them. He has friends in facebook and he even made an orkut account to get in better contact with Estonians, and that was years before he came here.

*I knew that social personality would be very interesting quite quiet. Some Americans would consider it rude, where as I don't consider it rude, in here people mind their own business, where as in America everyone is up in everyone's business, you know. First when I met people it was quite formal to shake hands and you know /---/*

Three students had their first live contact with Estonians with the taxi driver, so they didn't comment much on that part. Mostly one of the first contacts was their international tutor or someone from the university staff. From tutors part the students were happy to have met them and had lunch, where everything was explained etc.

Carlos had an interesting experience in Tallinn when no one in the tram spoke English and old lady gave him her seat because he had such heavy luggage. Also he almost lost his most important bag with all documents and money when an old lady run after him to pass it back to him. So his first impression was that Estonians are helpful and honest.

Daigo had a very bad first impression of Estonians as his first contact was not the nicest from coordinator of the university. Luckily later his contact improved.

*/---/She wasn't as helpful as I expected. She was just doing her job and nothing more than that. But we need support for entire life in Estonia, not just for application but also where to eat, where to buy, where to have fun. How about travel with neighbours, travel with room-mates, this kind of thing. I thought part of her job, but she didn't do anything. It was quite difficult. But there is a faculty of easy Asian studies of Tallinn university and Japanese language is the biggest thing currently, where more than 100 students study. It's a bit long story. I was supposed to live in the dormitory of Tallinn university "2" which was just under construction. Then I get there and there was no "2", only mattress on the floor, no kitchen, no toilet, only mattress. And they put us in there without explaining. It will come soon. When? And there was a huge discussion between the students and the university side. And that lady in charge I hated her. She was really useless. Anyway, so I decided to move out and I looked for somebody to let me stay for a while until dormitory got ready and one Estonian girl who studies Japanese kindly offered a place to stay. She was my second contact with Estonian. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Niels draw out that there is a clear difference between normal Estonians and students who are interested in the international students. And that there is also a different approach by the males and females in term on communication with foreigners- the girls tend to be more open.

*I think there is clear difference between the people who are ..like..interested in other international students and the typical Estonians- are reserved and shy ..like since I knew that Estonian people would be shy and reserved I already set my mind to it, so I think I wasn't that I was very surprised...like Oh my god, they are so shy !-/ It's ok. (Niels, M21, Holland)*

Petr, once he had arrived to Tartu, asked for the directions and the first person took him to the university and other contact that day also where very nice and he was happy about that.

*Actually a lot of people told me here that they aren't nice, they don't help you with anything but I have only good experiences . When I arrived first man told me where to go and when I arrived Annika Kalda told me everything I need and it worked out fine. Then I went to my faculty coordinator and she was also really nice to me. So I really liked Estonians. I saw all coordinators the first day. I was really happy and I also meet my tutor here. She also was really nice to me, and told me things I need to know. (Petr, M21, Czech Republic)*

When Ali had arrived to Raatuse he immediately went out looking for the pharmacy to treat his ear and he had a nice experience that he had not expected, as he had a very clear image of Estonians

before arrival.

*7--/. And since my ear was not OK I had to get some cotton and something to put on my ear. I was looking for a pharmacy, and the guard told me there is one in Raekoja Plats, which is open 24/7. I went there, I knocked the door, and I was freaking out and I didn't know they won't speak English and thought that would look at my beard and say who is this cold blooded expectation. I knocked the door and she didn't speak any English and I tried to explain and then she didn't understand me, and I thought I'm doomed, I'm gonna probably lose my ear here. And I opened the door again and told them wait a minute, and then I saw a guy he was really young and I asked if you speak any English, and he said Yes, and then I asked do you speak Estonian and he said he was Estonian and he helped me. He really helped me a lot on that night. And I was like, no, they are helpful and he wasn't really having this you know scared faced of foreigner; he helped me. And I was looking for food, and I asked some other people who were also Estonian and I said: "Excuse me can you show me a place to eat because I'm hungry?", and they were really nice and showed me a place. First night kind of killed my thoughts about Estonian. (Ali, M21, Turkey)*

## **1.2 Knowledge about Estonia before arrival and information channels**

Some people had more than basic information about Estonia prior to arrival. Three claimed that they knew nothing about Estonia before coming over. The interest and information need grew with the time.

Mostly Internet was used to get information- wikipedia, visittartu.com, visitestonia. Universities website was essential to get updates about studies and academic part. Google pictures and also youtube videos were scanned in order to get a better idea what to expect from student life parts.

Some students used every possible way to get connected with Estonians already years ago- made orkut account, added friends on Facebook and myspace, looked for videos on youtube.com etc and looked for various ways to get into contact. Some found the website for the Tartu town hall web cameras and watched it in order to see how many people there are.

For Daigo, Chriss and Ali there was a specific reason or person, who directed them to come to Estonia. Daigo was personally influenced. Chriss and Ali were interested in Estonia first and then got contacts from Estonia or knowledge from close friends who had already been here before.

One group of our students did not have any contact at all to Estonia before their decision to study abroad and the other group is people who had very strong influence by Estonians or some piece of information that made them come here. Very important factor here is personality of the student- some are curious by nature and some need a precise ``push`` from person/information.

Tiko and Katja just wanted to have exchange time somewhere abroad and university had competition for TU, so they applied. The fact that it was Estonia irrelevant and the will to come to

Estonia came later. Later Katja was asked several times if she is sure what she is doing and what were the reasons to go to Estonia- and that with a negative tone as in it is not safe here.

*So, there are always several programs to go abroad. Frankly speaking I have never thought about going to Estonia, but when this competition was announced I was just interested, I didn't want so much but, after I was really interested and after one stage I wanted it really very much (Katja, F20, Russia)*

Petr was in contact with Annika Kalda, the TU Erasmus coordinator and got all his info there.

Petr, Ali and also Nielss did not want to find out things before, he wanted to find things out by himself.

Daigo used the Japanese ministry of foreign affairs website to get info about Estonia. Daigos university had an agreement with all three Baltic states and he asked his coordinator witch one to choose and as she had been to all three she strongly suggested Estonia, because it was more developed. Japanese and Mexican both said they would have liked to read blogs written by their own people, about country, culture, not get formal information about prices and measures.

*Internet. For history I used wikipedia. Visittartu.ee for Tartu city. I was looking for blogs about Estonia by Mexicans who have been here or anyone really. My ex is in Finland and she read many blogs about Finish people, I didn't find anything bout Estonians, I would have liked that a lot. (Carlos, M20, Mexico)*

The other five people are grouped as persons who knew really little about Estonia. Tiko compared Georgia to Estonia for being under soviet occupation and now being free, Estonia is in another alliance and developing fast. She knew nothing of Tartu before, but found out that it is small and a student city. About the university she and Katja found out that its old and with many traditions and that her friends were really satisfied with studding here. Petr mentioned the similar past with his country. Petrs sister had been to Baltic's before and his friend told him about the good sports facilities in Tartu. Thomas, Nielss, Daigo and Carlos didn't have friends who had this direct experience themselves, but on the other hand their wish to come here was determined. Nielss mentioned that Skype was from Estonia and that he knew nothing about Estonia but that was the way he liked it. Daigo only had info from Estonian professor and also the coordinator from his university, who had been to all three basics and said Estonia was the nicest. To my great surprise in Japanese schools they teach about Baltic human chain, and song festivals and how we had a peaceful revolution. Daigo also knew that Tartu was Estonian cultural and educational heart.

*Only what I knew about Estonia. A Baltic country, one of the Baltic countries, near Russia, got independent in 1991, famous for "human chains" in 1989 and from singing revolution, the peaceful revolution. That's all I know (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Alis friend had told him about the great nightlife in Tartu, about how people know how to drink and party, how people crossed the bridge over the top and that Tartu was a great student city. He knew

that Estonia is a cheap country, cheaper than Italy. His friend also told him about Raatuse life, Zavood and Illusion and that it was a campus system in Tartu. Ali knew that Estonia was a former occupant country and now its a fast developing country in a transition period to EU. About the university he knew that its an old and second biggest one in Baltic's. He was also aware of the different climate and weather. The similar things were known to Carlos as well, just a bit less specific.

*I basically talked with my friend, Firat, he told me about the clubs basically and he was telling me about the bridge and how people are passing over it. And he told me about that its a student city, and this is also the fact that I know about Estonia that its cheap, cheaper than it would be in Italy or other European countries. He told me about Raatuse, and basically the simple stuff about where to eat and how to have fun in zavood and Illusion, he was telling me about festivals, like you have this crazy festival some time in May or...? April? (Ali, M22, Turkey)*

Chriss had interest in coming to Estonia even before going to university and he had a lot of contact with Estonians. Besides the basics he also knew about the Russian minority, medieval city of Tallinn, Swedish impact on Tartu, importance of Tartu as cultural and educational city.

*I think what I read about it that it was a very Swedish influenced city. I'm not completely familiar what that exactly means. I knew it was a very important location through the school, you know the school that has existed for 370 something years. (Chriss, M22, USA)*

As Sofias connection to Estonia and Estonians is in her blood through her grandparent and by going to Estonian school, then her knowledge about culture and people of Estonia before arrival was quite large. She had visited Tallinn before but had never been to Tartu.

*And my grandparent is from Estonia so ive been thinking about it for a while to, to I don't know try to live here and learn the language and since my school has a Tartu has a partner university I decided to apply (Sofia, F21, Sweden)*

Exchange students are different kind of people, they like to take risks and find themselves in various situations. One does not need a lot of information to make up a mind about where to go study, one very very little piece of info can be fatal in the sense that in situations before choosing the destination country every little detail of knowledge or not knowing anything can be the deciding reason. One lunch with a stranger or chat with a friend is often all we need to make up a mind.

These first questions give us better idea of the interviewees and what are their backgrounds and how are things for them personally working out in Estonia. There is a clear difference between exchange students who already have had a study or work abroad experience and those who do it the first time. Not in this question , but generally the idea of already be able to compare to more than just home country is a great advantage in sense of reception of new situations/people.

## **2 Experiences and cultural distances in Estonia**

### **2.1 Contact with Estonians**

#### **2.1.1 Where, how much contact they have with Estonians**

Exchange students find it quite hard to make Estonian contacts, the reasons are different. They find themselves to be isolated from Estonian students- exchange students mostly live in one dormitory, even on one floor and their courses are created specially for foreigners, so not many Estonians attend them. Students are satisfied with Raatuse (the dormitory) in general- its not expensive, its close to university and its modern, most students are happy about the fact that the international students live altogether although living with Estonian students would simplify making local friends. There is a clear division of students- one group likes the fact that all exchange students are living together and the other group is clearly against it. The second group promotes idea of living with an Estonian flat or roommate, as there is not much contact with Estonian students.

*I know a couple student s here. I wanted to have an Estonian room or flatmate. I think it would be great choice to have. There should be more interaction with Estonians. I get along with them quite well, mostly I hang out with internationals. (Chriss, M22, USA)*

Contact with Estonians is made mostly when going out to clubs or pubs.

Petr has very close contacts via sport- he is doing actively sports climbing and saalibändi, witch gives him a lot of chances to interact with Estonians. Chriss knew his Estonian friends before he even got to Estonia so now he is close contact with them ans spends quite a lot of time with them. Daigo takes advantage of being Japanese and looked up his contact in Tallinn university for Japanese courses. Katja has made some new friends during her class that she has with Estonians, she prefers to have mixed groups with Estonians and is positively surprised by their character and openness.

### **2.2 Perceived cultural differences**

In the interviews there were questions about best and worst moments in Estonia, what they liked most or least here and various other things were asked in order to find out the main difference and how they perceived them. In following chapter the answers are divided into different fields of perception.

### **1. Neutral things: climate, architecture, weather**

Chriss and Daigo liked mostly Estonian nature and also the medieval architecture, that is very different from what the architecture is back home. Tiko contradicts Daigo on the subject of having so many churches vs not having churches at all. Daigo is of clear opinion there are a lot of churches and they are first things you see from a city.

Tiko, Sofia and Daigo do not like climate that much on the other hand Petr really enjoys having snow.

*Frankly speaking what I dont like here, yeah? only weather. /--/ i feel good here. (Tiko, F19, Georgia)*

### **2. Personal - new friends, personality changes**

Petr misses home a lot so, for him one of the best moments is a dinner with Czech and Slovak nuns who have lived in Tartu for 8 years already, he was happy because this event made him feel like at home. Petr and Sofia are happy to have met new people among Estonians and also among exchange students.

For Tiko worst moment is connected to the fact that she is the only daughter and her mother was very worried when she left for such a long time.

*Probable it was after one week the worst moment, because Im the only daughter of my parents and my mother did not really like that I was coming here, she liked it but she was afraid, because she always was looking for me and when I was talking to her I was felt that she was sad (Tiko, F19, Georgia)*

Tiko really likes everything about Estonia, but what she likes about the time she has spent here especially is the fact that she has become more independent and no one has control over what she is doing, in Georgia she lives with her parents, same factors come out with Carlos.

### **3. Estonian culture and Estonians, getting to know new culture**

Petr liked the moment when he first started to play saalibändi with the Estonian team. Sport activity as the best moment is brought out by Daigo too. Daigo finds joy in doing something traditional Estonian like visiting a summer cottage of his friend or taking part of folk dancing in Viljandi folk- these are his top moments in Estonia. He really likes how close Estonians and the nature is.

*One is I plaid baseball in Estonian baseball team. There are two in . Two teams in Estonia, only two teams. One team has like 15 or 16 members, all together 30 baseball players in Estonia. But anyway, I really enjoyed it. There is a Baltic league. Estonia two teams, Latvia two teams and Lithuania three teams./--/ Also I went to Viljandi Folk. I went to folk. . I likes it so much. And the people taking hand with each other. And dancing. That's what I like. In this point I thought, Estonia, are they really individualistic? Usually Estonia is said to be like individualistic, don't care about others and only your*

*own. Defined to the statistical of Estonia, it's the one with the biggest income gap between poor and rich among European countries. But Estonia's are kind of together. /--/I visited my friend's summer cottage. In the morning I woke up, the cottage was seaside and his mother and grandmother was waiting at the time. Wake up, get out, I saw his mother swimming in the sea, without anything.. Naked. Can you imagine, swimming in the sea naked. Surreal. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Worst moments for Daigo associate with his first months in Tallinn, when he had no Estonia's friends. He didn't like the idea of being in Estonia and not having any contact with Estonia's Chrissis best experience was somewhat different and unexpected- he experienced a cultural clash between skinheads and Russians-

*Anyways, im a big metal head. And in Estonia there is a big subculture going on. So one night we decide to go to Krooks. We meet up with this Russians and start small talking to Maxim, and then we start also interacting with his other Russian friends. Then there is a table of skinheads, who don't really understand why we are talking to Russians. And one moment we go to have a cigarette, and then this guy in 30s comes there and ask Max if he has problems with Estonians, and his like nonono, im just telling him , his from Florida. And one moment, they get into like verbal conflict. I can see it from their body language, and they start talking on conflicts within skinheads and Russians metal heads. Then I ask Maxis friend to explain what is going on, translate and he goes like don't worry about it you are American you wouldn't understand, and I say ok, I know im American, I know where I come from, I might not have roots here and I didn't grow up here, but you know I read about these things and im interested. I can see there is a serious conflict within these two and they are about to fight soon so something happens, they push each other. I turn my head to these I assume true skinheads /---/ the asshole version of the skinheads come up, I don't know what was going on and there was a fight, and I have to admit there was a quite bit of tension. I have to admit, I was very curios what was going on. Was bit scared, so I was chill. The skins were pissed that the Russian guy was talking to me, you know the allie of Estonian not Russian. Its was just interesting. It was my best in the fact that most interesting experience.(Chriss, M22, USA)*

Chrissis worst moment is connected to the fact that he is American and one Estonian elder man did not like the fact that a young Estonian girl is with an American.

Food is the most negative subject for Ali- he does not like sugary things with salty things, and he doest think its that various here – same thing was brought out by Carlos.

Petr and Nielss say that their homeland is really similar to Estonia only few difference like more bikes in students general lifestyle and transportation structure in Holland and different socializing in pub culture in Czech Republic.

Carlos brings examples how different Mexico is from Estonia, with having streets full of life and action.

*Mm mm....people I would say. In here its like cold. Mexico is full of life all the time talking and going to main square many people selling stuff, music, children playing in fountains etc. (Carlos, M20, Mexico)*

Carlos and Tiko feel safer in Estonia than back home, but on the other hand they mention the weather not to be that good. One more thing Carlos, Tiko and Ali find similar is the traffic culture,



namely the fact that cars stop on the crossroads to let pedestrians pass.

#### **4. Economic and social (living in Raatuse)**

Alis best moment was visiting the anatomical museum, where really different diseases and people were shown, he found it very fascinating and he learned a lot from the visit. For his worst moment he graded his ear disease at the very beginning. He also visited a hospital for that and the doctor there told him he might have HIV, witch he recalled to be scary , as he was warned several times before arrival to Estonia that its a dangerous problem here.

Nielss likes the ways how Estonia combine old and new and how even older people are `young`` In the sense of technology:

*I like it how you try to use modern ways of communication and technologies for pretty much everything. But compared to like the old traditions and old buildings and...I think that you really have set a good example how you cam combine old and new things together, I really like that. Like for example the Tallinn Old Town is really good like, pretty and all, but still people aren't as old. And people are opened to new technology. I think I couldn't teach my grandma how to use Internet , I'm not sure, but I have the feeling that even old people are a little bit more into that here. Maybe because they kind of have to, but... (Nielss, M22, Holland)*

Ali likes Tartus nightlife, Chriss agrees that Estonians know how to party.

Nielss (and also Carlos) finds Holland (Mexico) to be much more diverse in the sense of people and Holland is a country of solidarity.

Nielss, Tiko, Daigo, Chriss all mention Estonia to be well developed and ahead of their country on the e-Estonia and technology wise. Nielss likes Tartu and the fact that one can walk everywhere and that there is a lot to do.

Tiko finds political similarities between Georgia and Estonia:

*They are different, but they have some similarities too. They are both small countries, both have similar history of 20 century, both are friends in political aspects and both have hum, a similar, hum goals about EU and other things, but the structure of universities are similar and that was not very difficult to get used to it. /---/*

The diversity of answers shows that these were not easy questions to be answered and the things that are fresh in mind were also answered. The fast development of technology and society is a general thing to be noticed. Further countries bring out more difference than closer ones, so the cultural dimensions start to come out more and more.

## 2.3 Experience and contacts to Estonians

All students like Estonians and wish that they had more contact with local students or Estonians in general. The problem to most is that the classes and living facilities are separate from Estonians, and that makes it harder to find contact. Some classes are still together with Estonian students, but the problem there is that Estonians often tend to group together and not search contact with other students that clearly.

The classification here goes as following: ones that have very good contact with Estonians, ones who have some contact and wish to have more (also do something to improve the situation) and the ones that have no contact wish to have more but on the other hand also enjoy time with other students.

Good contacts: Ali, Chriss, Sofia, Thomas

What Chriss really likes about Estonians is that once you have befriended with an Estonian one can be sure that this is a friend for life.

*There is so much pride, I went to the metal concert of metsatõll, and people are proud of their pagan roots. People from hiiumaa and saaremaa and pärnu, this is what I don't have as an American this national pride rooted in my genetics. In USA people came over from all over Europe and people took lands from the Indians, we occupied it, we always occupied it /---/ The only pride I have is different. /---/ it comes from the top, its materialistic. In Estonia its below line, its deep.*

*I think if you make a friend with an Estonian you make a friend for life. They keep their word always. American makes promises and not keep them. Estonians are freaking honest, have an opinion. (Chriss, M22, USA)*

Chriss brings out the curiosity of Americans and Estonians to be quite similar:

*Estonians are curious people but they are more quite in their curiosity, not like Americans ``hey what is that?`` Estonians, they have same level of curiosity but they approach it differently thats one thing ive noticed. (Chriss, M22, USA)*

Sofia makes an interesting comparison to Asian countries, she finds the spirit of doing better and to improve that Estonians have also to be in the Asian countries that she has been to.

Some contacts: Nielss, Petr, Daigo, Katja

Petr brings out Estonians pride for every small thing to be a negative aspect, Chriss and Daigo on the other hand think that Estonian pride is something really good. Nielss also brings out the national pride idea.

*Dutch people are not as proud of their country. Like you cannot wear out the Dutch flag this is sign of like racism or nationalism..but the Dutch flag is related to neo-Nazis. When we play any sports then you are allowed to. (Nielss, M22, Holland)*

Also another thing Daigo notices is the closeness to nature of Estonia's He claims Estonians to

differ from Europeans with the fact that even the youth has not forgotten the old ways to live in and with the nature:

*Because usually younger generation forget this kind of exposing yourself to nature. Because when society developed and especially people who live in the city, we get used to living in artificial environment. And used to maybe enjoying time with “?”, but still Estonian young people prefer to be in the nature. That’s what I like. That makes Estonia different from Europe. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Important thing Daigo brings out with similarities of Japanese and Estonian people is the way of reacting to the outer world, we have to keep calm in order to keep peace in our country and to preserve what we have:

*Estonia has long history. I think so. Estonia has just big nation for not so long years. After 20<sup>th</sup> century. But history itself is long. Back to, at least a long time ago. I was thinking, why Estonia, that has such a small population can survive for such a long time in history, living here, keeping their special language. I think Estonia's are good at creating harmony and keeping peace among people, avoiding conflict. Fighting against something, fighting against authority. You live 20<sup>th</sup> century, but still kind of habit, kind of try not to cause unnecessary arguments or conflicts. Japan has also this strong tradition. Because such a small island, 1.20 Million population living there. Crazy, we have to be friendly with the people around you. The best way to avoid conflict is put your emotion back. Try not to express your opinion with anger. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

#### Little contacts: Carlos, Tiko

Carlos really likes Estonians now and disagrees with what they told on orientation about Estonians, that they are cold and like silence. Carlos finds that there is a clear difference between boys and girls, same things is mentioned by Nielss. He has also had a bad experience in one of the night clubs:

*One guy tried to fight me in Tallinn club. I was wearing pink and I think here he just was weird I was going to toilet and he hit me. I don't know why, but I was with other students so he didn't do anything else. Maybe he thought I was different. (Carlos, M20, Mexico)*

Carlos sees a clear difference in the relations between boys and girls, in Mexico there is much more respect towards women, guys are expected to be gentleman:

*Mexicans are really good with being gentleman with all the girls. In Mexico its a custom if you walk on the side of the street then the girl walks inside to the street. In here I haven't seen boys opening the doors to girls, in Mexico we always do that. (Carlos, M20, Mexico)*

Ali on contradicts Carlos on the manners subject and claims Estonians to be very well mannered.

#### *Other examples:*

Nielss, Sofia, Petr and Daigo think that Estonians are quite similar to their nation, just maybe a

little bit more open minded on some subject. This is quite remarkable how different cultures see Estonians to be similar- Holland, Sweden, Poland and Japan. Swedish and Polish geographical and historical closeness is clear, with Holland its the similarity of the civilizations and also geographically we are not that far. Three guys, Nielss, Daigo and Carlos complain about the bad service they get in restaurants or in shops:

Daigo: *They say “tere?” But they don’t smile. In Japan usually you smile “tere”. And they usually carefree take what you want to buy. They are like throwing, hey what are you doing with my milk? Bitch! For me it’s so rude. Customer , we still have a strong believe, customer is the god. Customer has to be the king. If you want to do business, you have to put the customer. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

Estonians are individualistic in the eyes of Petr and Sofia- they want to do things on their own first and then ask for help.

Nielss and Carlos both agree that there is a clear difference between normal Estonians and Estonians who are interested in the international students, like former Erasmus or ESN members. Both guys also think that there is a difference between boys and girls, that guys are more shy and girls more open to meet and talk with foreign students. Also students are more open to interact than older people. Niels brings out a very interesting idea about Estonia not being eastern Europe.

*like there is Eastern Europe and there is Estonia that is not Eastern Europe, but it's also they have like.. Eastern Europe I think are Polish people, (Nielss, M22, Holland)*

Carlos, Ali and Tiko find Estonians to be very helpful and not that cold, maybe just in the very beginning. Carlos and Ali find Estonians to be very well educated and students to try really hard to be even better students. Tiko and Ali bring out the religion to be the clear difference between two cultures, Petr sees not being religious country to be a big similarity.

Generally not much contact is made, but if they have contact now than its taken as a very positive thing. Difference in people is seen as a good thing and interest, curiosity is there, but often hard to tame for having not regular contacts. Four people thought that Estonians are similar to their own nation.

## **2.4 General satisfaction with exchange studies in Estonia**

All students are happy with their choice of coming to study in Tartu University- with these few months they have made a lot of new friends, talked a lot in English, found out more about Estonia,

participated in interesting classes.

All students like Estonia now and talk about their good experience here. The nations who come from warm countries and also Swedish girl mention the weather and the dark nights.

Chriss is happy about the level of the classes and the professionalism of some professors and also methodology of his Estonian teacher. He is very happy about the courses.

Some students find the classes too easy and the others bit too hard. The ones who find it hard also have a more limited knowledge of English, and I think its in direct connection. For example Petr and Carlos both find some classes too difficult. On the other hand Tiko, Sofia, Nielss, Katja find class too easy. Nielss even questions if the professors know the system of ECTS because in Holland its much more strict in a way.

*some courses are 6 ECTS credits and they are very easy, but then there is 3 credit course, which is easy but takes a lot of work, but also challenges...and then I have a 3 credit course which takes a lot of work- way more then 3 ECTS stands for /-/-So I was like...are you aware how the ECTS system works? /-/ (Nielss, M22, Holand)*

Katja is happy to have met all the foreigners on Raatuse and least happy about being so far from home

*I think with the communication with all the foreigners and the nature. But nature not here...our friends house it's not here, but somewhere. I don't know where, because we drive there. It's really nice. I think all day /-/ (Katja, F20, Russia)*

Petr is very happy with the professors, in comparison to his the professors back home TU has really professional ones:

*In CZ they are really bad, awfully, we got maybe 3 from 10 good professors. And then the rest is.. really old professors, who didn't teach us anything, and some young losers who cant do any work so they teach. Its in my school like that, but in English then its another level.*

Thomas, from Bologna University was very satisfied with the professors as one gave him private lessons the whole semester.

*I'm totally satisfied, they were very kind. Especially one. I didn't have enough courses in English so one professor just gave me and my mate some sort of private lesson for whole semester. Its totally impossible in Italy I didn't ask, I just wrote an email and we started to talk and he suggested other courses but it didn't fit me, so I asked if I can do the exam in English, he said OK. I will teach you. (Thomas, Italy)*

### **3 Adaptation/adoption and improvement issues**

#### **3.1 Readiness for adaptation**

The question of different languages and if they study Estonian or Russian here is of important factor and shows us how much he person is really into the Estonian culture and idea of getting to know Estonia better, on the other hand it also tends to be irrelevant as the language is hard to master and students tend to know this before they pick witch language they wish to learn. The motives of learning Estonian are different. The motives of learning Russian are same- its a powerful country and in terms of making international business its probable useful to know it a little bit.

Our ten interviewees answered the questions of languages that they speak. English is mostly their second foreign language and is taught at an early age in school. Spanish, German and French are popular as second foreign language, in our case German tends to be more popular than the other two. Georgians study Russian as the second foreign language (probable due to the geographical closeness) the Swedish girl is a clear exception in learning Estonian as a second foreign language as she went to Estonian school in Stockholm. Once the students come here they can choose if they want to study Russian or Estonian language. They have either intensive language course for few weeks and /or normal course within the semester. Two of our students decided to study both- Estonian and Russian and two decided not to learn any additional language and after interviews author can make conclusion that the two students who decided to learn both also have the most contacts to local students. Still, three students study only Russian and two study only Estonian. If given a choice to master one (or two) extra language fluently then Russian and French were mentioned three times. French with other romantic languages (Spanish and Italian) would make up the most popular group with half of the students wishing to know it. Estonian is mentioned once by a Japanese man, and Japanese is also mentioned once by an American student. The general level of English of students is rather good- it is of importance that English is the first foreign language for the author and most of the students. Czech and Japanese persons English was not excellent, but author considers nothing important to have been lost in the interviews. Mastering the local language breaks one barrier to communicate with the hosting people. Later the research analysis will show weather the people who chose to learn Estonian also get adopted better. The last column is the a free choice of a language or languages that person would choose to know very well. This shows us the general wish of a person to know a nation/culture better as

language is a basic thing to know about a culture

*Table 3: Persons and their first, second and other languages\**

<b>country</b>	<b>Mother tongue</b>	<b>II language after English</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>Est /rus</b>	<b>I choice</b>	<b>Level of English**</b>
USA	English	Spanish,	-	Estonian Russian	Japanese, native American lg.	I
Turkey	Turkish	German	Greek, Hebrew	Estonian Russian	French	I
Mexico	Spanish	German	-	Russian	Italian, French	II
Japan	Japanese		-	Estonian	Est, rus, fin	III
Russia	Russian	French		Estonian	German	I
Holland	dutch	German	Spanish		Spanish	I
Czech rep	Czech	German	-	Russian	Italian	III
Sweden	Swedish	Estonian	French	-	Russian	I
Italy	Italian	German	French	Estonian	Russian	II
Georgia	Georgian	Russian	German	Russian	French	II

\* First row after the country of origin shows the mother tongue, second row is the language learned after English and the fourth row is for other languages learned. The table also shows if the exchange student has decided to learn Estonian and /or Russian. Last row indicates the language that they would like to master most. Level of English is given by the author on the basis of the interview. As everyone's first language to learn was English it is removed from the table.

\*\* level I excellent, level II very good, level III good

The following column gives 5 favorite countries and 5 countries that the student would like to visit most. These two kind of information and the mentioning of Estonia within the favorite countries mark a meaning of their stay here. Some excluded Estonia or their home country on purpose of knowing these two very well already.

*Table 4: Persons top five favourite countries (cities) and top five of witch they would like to visit most\**

<b>Name</b>	<b>5 favorite</b>	<b>5 like to visit</b>
Chriss	Mexico, Argentina, Netherlands, Germany, Singapore	Mexico, Argentina, Netherlands, Germany, Singapore
Ali	USA, Turkey, Estonia, Cuba, Netherlands	Cuba, Netherlands, Iran, India
Carlos	England, France, Poland, Greece, Dubai.	Brussels, Prague, Russia, Denmark
Daigo	Turkey, Estonia, Korea, France, Malaysia	India, Russia, Iran, Tibet, Senegal/Ghana
Katja	Russia, US, Italy, France, the UK	Germany, Ita, Syria, Brazil, Portugal
Niels	Netherlands, USA, Australia, Suriname, Est	Spain, USA, Brazil, Australia, South Africa
Petr	Canada, Italy, New Zealand, Czech, Slovakia	Canada
Sofia	France, Thailand, Denmark, Greece, USA	Canada, Japan, South Africa, Australia and India
Thomas	Estonia, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Italy	USA, Japan, Norway, China, India
Tiko	Georgia, Germany, est, Belgium, Brazil	Brazil, Australia, Switzerland, USA, Japan

\* After the name of the person there are 5 countries that they consider to be their favourite and the third row is for the 5 countries they would like to visit most.

The upper chart shows us where Estonia lies for the exchange student and also what other countries are in the same distance as Estonia. As favorite countries the exchange students picked the ones that they had been to or the countries had some influence on them. As the ones that they would like to visit most then further countries still with some personal contacts or just really far away and different countries were chosen. The favorite countries are not in the following order.

For favorite countries mostly closer countries were chosen. Estonia was mentioned to be in top 5 favorite country by Georgian, Italian, Dutch, Japanese and Turkish, so half of the students. Home countries were also mentioned about half of the times. USA and France are mentioned four times to be favorite . Germany, Italy are brought out twice. Students tend to choose countries where they have been to either for a longer time or the countries that have had an impact on them personally, also knowing people from those countries leaves an impression.

Top five countries that our ten students would like to visit most are picked out in random order. Mostly they picked countries where they had never been to before, but have had a good impression of the people or from the media about the countries. Most popular country was surprisingly an exotic



country – India with 4 votes. Three votes got Japan, Brazil, Australia and USA. In this manner USA gets the most votes in total for being favorite and also for wish to visit it. The students picked various countries here, no one chose all five countries from same continent or countries that are close to each other- this was of choosing shows how mobile the students really are. No European country was exotic enough to come up in this short list, just Germany and Netherlands got two votes competing against Canada, Iran and SA.

This data lets the author to conclude that Estonia is one of the favorite countries either way because they chose to come here and discover it. In the case of exchange students in Estonia we can refer to the idea that they are more open to different cultures and are special group within the mobility group. The students are curious- we can notice that in their destination countries chosen, these are exotic countries from all over the world. This curiosity for exciting and exotic country is also brought to Estonia, while discovering other exchange students and maybe not that much interacting with local students.

### **3.2 Improvement issues**

Last part of the interview was about the improvement issues from the Universities part. Also how to make the conditions of exchange students better in Tartu.

All students are happy to have come here and will recommend their friends to come here as well and have a great and special experience. All ten wanted to come back here sooner or later. Half students consider working here if the conditions would be good and about the same amount have already looked into possibilities to make their degree here. Sofia and Petr had a shared opinion about students back home having a wrong idea about Estonia being still really similar to Russia and not developed. Petr is studying sports management and he was very happy about the sport facilities here and will tell his friends in Prague, who are studying same thing about the great facilities. Tiko, Carlos and Ali were of the opinion that Estonia is a great place to come because its easy to travel to other EU countries from here. Sofia, Nielss, Thomas and Ali will emphasise the Erasmus and Raatuse experience they had in Tartu, and that its perfect to be living in Raatuse, as it is a big melting pot of the cultures.

## **University part:**

For improvement on the courses part Nielss thought that courses could have more balance between writing papers and having exams. He compares having too many papers to do versus just one exam in the end of the year. Nielss is really not happy with the situation of printing papers and how everything is digital, he does not like to read his material on-line, he would prefer hard copies, even if he had to pay for it.

Daigo brought out a point what not to come to study in TU and also a good subject to come study here:

*If you want to study the European union things, then France and Germany can be the best. It's up to what they're studying. If they are interested in these political Russian minorities, minority issues, human rights, then here can be interesting place. If you want to study science, then United States, maybe Japan. (Daigo, M27, Japan)*

American student found the system for registration to class to be too complicated and he had to ask for help in order to understand it completely. It could be made more simple. Chriss was worried about the fact that most exchange students don't have Estonian friends:

*It kinda bothers me coz I have so many Estonian friends that are cool. Whenever you have someone coming to this country then they will have a negative appeal once they go back if they haven't made any native friends so to say. I don't consider this to be the healthiest thing on the screens, you know. Why are they here first of all, is to have an experience abroad, well they can also have a cultural experience as well and a lot of that comes from Estonian friends they make. A buddy network that allows to get contact with Estonia's would be a good thing. (Chriss, M22, USA)*

## **ESN**

Everyone was very happy about the events ESN had organized them, but also suggested of having more sports activities or smaller trips to the country side together with Estonian students in order to get to know Estonians better.

## **Tutors**

Tutors were considered to be helpful, but most students didn't meet them more than the first time. Two exchange students have a close contact with their tutors.

Only one student wasn't happy about the work of the international student office, nine were completely satisfied and claimed that they got a lot of help from there, especially in the beginning. The staff of the international student office was brought out to be very friendly and helpful.

## **Integration**

First idea for most students was to involve more Estonians to their classes and by group works create the connection. Two students claimed that in their home university there are no special classes

for exchange students, so locals integrate better with exchange students. One person suggested to have mix living boxes in Raatuse. Trips to country side with many Estonian students was considered essential for integration.

### **Attraction of more exchange students**

Mostly poor advertisement and marketing of TU was brought out. No one really knew anything from TU, some said that their international student office back home only had brochures of Vilnius and Riga, but not Tartu. Suggestions about the improvement of marketing were made- 1. give brochures to exchange students who are going back home 2. give brochures to Estonians who are going abroad.

For some student it didn't really matter what university it was, as long as it was in Estonia, but then ISEP or bilateral contracts were only signed with TU.

Ali suggested to emphasize that Tartu, Estonia is cheap compared to other European Union countries and that its still the same level of education etc. TU should also bring out the fact that Tartu is a student city with many students and great facilities to party- this is what the students who are going to exchange really look for.

*Because the the Erasmus idea in Turkey is like..loosing up and seeing Europe it's exchange student - explore Europe. SO..it's economics and the student life that would attract them more (Ali, M21, Turkey)*

### **3.3 View of experts about improvement and cultural adaptation**

For the experts two persons were chosen: 1. Veeli Oeselt- president of Erasmus Student Network Tartu and 2. Annika Kalda international students coordinator in the TU. This way two sides of the students life is reflected- the academic one and the free time one. It is useful to know that both experts have been on exchange themselves- in Germany and in USA. The two interviews – expert and exchange student- are in a way combined to know how one party sees the same thing, in this way also the adaption-adoption part of students staying here can be analysed. Questions for the both interviews came from personal experience on spending much free time with exchange students. As the theoretical part is largely based on Hofstede's five dimensions then the interview concentrates more profoundly on the same issues- just he made a quantitative analysis and here a quality one is made. The general idea from TU is that they wish to have more exchange students and they try to give the best services due to that. In comparison there are many Spanish and Italian universities who do not care about the numbers because they have so many exchange students- they mostly do not provide accommodation, English

courses, special professors, orientations, funds for voluntaries etc – this is the infrastructure that TU already has and is only working to make it even better. A bill was reintroduced in TU- while being on an academic year one can study and transact the ECTS, this bill was reintroduced due to one main reason, the numbers of students going out mobility were not growing any more.

As the living conditions were criticised many times as in the possibility to have an Estonian room mate then comments from experts are expected. Making exchange in a different country gives students many possibilities to discover new nations and new living ways- this lifestyle is very different from the lifestyle of a normal Estonian/ local student. As was mentioned by exchange students then they have a lot of parties, they are mobile and travel a lot in Estonia and also in Europe, they are more relaxed here then back home, if they skip class for a week nothing happens. Their classes are easier- many professors give easy tasks and better grades, its easier to get ECTS points while being on exchange than back home- its a generalisation made by author having talked to a lot of exchange students and experts all around Europe. And then we have the local student, who has to go to class every week, is stressed for having too many exams, is writing thesis at nights, already has Estonian friends network and takes life more seriously as university is more important. If the dormitory staff puts these two together then no good can come out of this- it has been tested on Estonians before, there are two ways, either they complain about the noise and parties or they go along with it and loose motivation to study (off course there are exceptions to that) There are many Estonians who wish to be on that 4<sup>th</sup> party-floor in Raatuse.

For Veeli clear distinguishments of nations came out, on the other hand Annika Kalda said it depended on a person weather or not they are nice.

*It would be thinking in stereotypes. It really depends on the people and how they think about other nationalities. For me personally are the most annoying nationalities the Italians and Spanish because they are always late. But I still have also really good friends who are from these countries. We are just different, have different values. Hence we just should accept each other.. They have other qualities, what I really love ... (V.Oeselg, ESN)*

Both experts said they wish to spend more free time with exchange students. Veeli met exchange students more often, as she organises some ESN events and has contact to them there. Both parties try to give the best services once the exchange students are here and help them out whenever needed.

*We try to help to integrate the exchange students better to the new surrounding. Also we're always there if they have any problems or questions. And how we do that – right from the beginning we organise events and actions for them. First we meet them at the orientation week and right after that we have our two first events like Pub Crawl and Welcome Party. Our goal is to give them the opportunity to get to know each other and the of course also to get them in contact with Estonians and integrate them. (V. Oeselg, ESN)*

*University hosts the orientation week on their first week and we have ESN who does the free time activities. We definitely encourage students to find Estonian friends, but it is tricky at times. (A. Kalda, TU)*

As for criticism then the ESNer brings out same fields that also exchange students see to be problematic and University clarifies what has been done so far to make the conditions better.

*We should organise some evaluation for the courses and level of teaching. And ask also what the exchange students really would need more here, or what they have been missing during their exchange year or semester here. Maybe also the living conditions, the dorm could be better. The integration with Estonians could start already from the university level. That means that to many courses are just for exchange students, they do not have many opportunities to meet Estonians at the university. And also they are also all living together in the dorm. And also one small thing is, that the exams should be in December so they can fly home for Christmas. (V. Oeselg, ESN)*

According to Kalda University has a feedback form passed to every exchange student once they leave and last time we had more than 50 students answering questions about various topics. University is always waiting for the answers to come in for making an evaluation and try to fix things over time, so TU would be even better and more attractive to foreigners.

All TU staff speaks English and the lectures are given in English, that means the students do not have a need to study Estonian and their motivation to know the language is automatically lost. The adaption of the foreign students is made easy, but on the contrary this makes the adoption very hard- the local students do not have same grounds with exchange students. Other example from the personal experience of the author comes from Spain- the students must learn Spanish as no one will talk to them in English and in few month the mentality of the exchange students is expressed in this short sentence ``Hey, why are you speaking English? We are in Spain and must speak Spanish`` meaning, even when the students are on their own they use Spanish language to interact. It is quite amazing strategy- the universities choose not to adopt for the exchange students rather than let the exchange student adapt to the local life by learning the language and taking over the local standard as fast as possible. Still, even if this group learns the local language and acts by the local rules, exchange students tend to stick together as their conditions are same and they are experiencing culture on their own pace.

Experts agreed that next years the numbers of mobility might fall due to the economic crises all over, but it should get better again in few years. As for now the numbers are still the same, but not all nominations are in yet.

The experts generally support the opinions of our exchange students. Main topics were covered by both experts and the answers were sufficient to see the background of it.

## Answers to research questions

10 exchange students of Tartu University and 2 experts from Tartu University answered series of questions so that the research questions would be answered (for audio file and transcriptions see appendix 4)

First part gave a general overview of the exchange student and also the reasons to have chosen Estonia as a destination country. A Swede, Georgian, Italian, Dutch, Russian, Japanese, Mexican, American, Turkish and Czech student gave a personal background to making exchange semester or year in Tartu University. The reasons are different and either have a personal approach or are connected to their university back home having a contract with TU.

### **1. What do exchange students know about Estonia and Estonians prior to arrival?**

There are two stages time before their arrival: 1. when they have not picked their destination country yet and 2. when they already know that they are coming here. In stage 1. most students replied that they knew only basic about Estonia- location, climate, former soviet occupation. But some students were deeply interested in this region already before deciding to come here. In stage 2. students get curious about Estonia and life in Tartu, they look for web cams, blogs, videos about Estonia on line etc. The interest and information grows till the time they get to Estonia. Some students try to find contact before their arrival- contact to Estonian local students, their friends who have been to Estonia before or contact to the group of exchange students who will be in Tartu at the same period of time.

### **2. How are the cultural distances perceived?**

#### **2.1. Do geographically closer cultures perceive Estonians more positively than geographically further cultures?**

According to previous studies, members of different cultures sample with diverse probabilities different kinds of information from their environment (Triandis 2000) thus, closer cultures have to adopt with less ``strange`` situations. Author found this argument to be hypothetically true, but the distance and likeness seem to have no connection with the exchange students. For geographically closer cultures (in our case Sweden) might have direct personal relations to Estonia, or a personal Interest in a far away/exotic country or previous contacts to Estonia might play a big role. But as for the 10, then there

is no precise answer supporting this question. On the other hand two most distant nationalities (geography wise)- American and Japanese loved Estonia, maybe even more than their own country.

However, this question needs further investigation due to the fact that it should not be analyzed on 10 interviews as it is too few people giving their own personal opinions, but rather a formalized quantitative research could answer this research question.

## **2.2. How does the stereotype of Estonia and Estonians change during their stay here?**

Firstly general idea about Estonians was that they are shy and cold, but this stereotype was overruled by helpful and reserved the moment that contacts were made. After getting more contacts there are two possibilities: 1. the students who have more contacts and are close with Estonian people think that Estonians are not shy and can be outgoing people, with deep past and pride of their country. 2. the ones that have less contacts still find Estonians to be reserved

Different approach from guys and girls and also ``normal `` Estonians and Estonians who have some international background such as having been on exchange themselves. Estonians compared to their nations are better organised, shy, more reserved, but also outgoing , true friends, honest, very helpful, try hard, close to nature, proud of their county, nation and history etc. A few nations consider Estonians to be similar to their own nations, maybe just more outgoing on some perspectives.

## **2.3 How much contact to Estonians do exchange students get? Do International students want to have more contact to Estonians and do they want to know Estonian culture better?**

This question is answered by the exchange students very clearly- mostly they are isolated from Estonian students. Exchange students have their own dormitory of Raatuse, where they mostly live on the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floor, general rule is that Estonians don't share flats with exchange students, thus creating a contact there is not very likely. Secondly they have their own courses and whole programmes that are specially meant for exchange students. There is also a possibility to take courses with Estonians (some courses are offered in English) but also there the Estonians tend to stick together and not be very hospitable towards other nationalities.

## **2.4 On G. Hofstede's chart where would the individuals place Estonia compared to their own country and based on their own experience?**

Four dimensions out of five came out during the analysis, only power distance dimension does not give

precise answers within the interviews. It might be connected to the fact that mostly the students are quite young and have not worked in a serious field to see how the leaders act. In Estonia they do not have the best overview on this subject.

Given the chance to place Estonia in a their personal perception chart from very close to not close at all the exchange students picked two ways: 1. Estonia very close- the reason is that they have stayed here not longer and know the culture better and 2. Estonia close to not close- students think back where Estonia was before their coming here and still feel it has not changed over two months (For chart see appendix nr 1).

According to the both analysis Estonia is considered to be close country to Nordic and also Baltic countries. Estonians are seen as quite similar or on the other side very different people compared to exchange students home nationalities, but nothing really sticking or new is brought out, If students brought out at least somethings that matched with Hofstede's dimensions.

### **3. What adaptation strategies are used?**

#### **3.1 How efficient is TU using its channels to promote the university and student life, what channels the exchange students used to find out about Estonia /TU?**

The most useful channel are the students who go back to their country and tell their friends about their experience in Estonia- It can be either being here on a trip or on exchange. Youtube, facebook, orkut and other communities are used to find out more about their practical part of staying here. Marketing to the other universities seemed to be quite poor as no one really knew about TU before coming here and getting a precise interest in it.

Before arrival student got sufficient information about Estonia, though not having blogs from other exchange students who have already lived here was brought out to be a lack. TU provided good service before their arrival and also the first weeks, when students had some problems. The orientation days were considered useful and many contacts were created there already.

#### **3.2. What acculturation strategies do the individuals use? How much contact to Estonians do exchange students get? What does the amount of having Estonian friends and Estonian contacts depend from?**

Acculturation strategies question can be looked upon in two ways: 1. in-between just exchange students, as they don't normally have much contact with Estonians 2. in-between exchange students and



Estonians, but this classification can only be broadened to the students who have contacts with Estonians. And the answer would be: 1. in-between exchange students they have a melting pot of cultures in Raatuse dormitory and the dominant society there would be international students vs home country. In this case all four variations of Berry (1999) are possible and feasible. Most likely integration with the international students group would happen, but on the other hand some, who do not like living in Raatuse choose the way of assimilation. 2. in-between Estonians and exchange students also four ways are possible, but here integration and separation are the ways that are chosen. No one abandons their own nation and culture.

Some students were very interested in making Estonian friends and two boys even have Estonian girlfriends now. Sport is also a good way to make Estonians contacts. Once the barrier of reservedness was broken it is easy to communicate with Estonians, many new contacts were made in bars and night clubs. A possible way to integrate was cut out by only having classes for exchange students. On the other hand there are also students who claim to have a lot of local friends and get along with them on daily basis. The students who took classes with Estonians found it hard to break the ice at first, but eventually friendships were formed also in classes.

## Discussion

Being a member of a NGO that is closely involved with arriving exchange students author has quite many comments to the answers covered with the semi structured quantitative interviews with the exchange students. At times the background information did not come out in the interview rather than just the experience of knowing so many exchange students personally helped to develop the way to get the answers. The aim of this thesis was to find out how exchange students see Estonia and what are the main strategies they use in Estonian environment to get adopted. The research questions of this thesis were answered and many new ideas about topics that would need further research came out. One aspect that deserves looking into is weather the new generation mobility can already or soon be perceived as a whole new culture- according to Triandis 4 points of having a national stereotype then these are already existing within the Erasmus students. Another interesting remarque is that the persons who know little about Estonia choose to come here for the very fact- what is the specific reason here, is it just the type of people or does this hide a reason that can not be spelled out.

The facilities for exchange students in Tartu University are on average level compared to other foreign universities the author has been to. TU has modern dormitories, large library, flexible lectors and students who carry the traditions of the university town. The exchange students are put in same dormitory and mostly also on the same floor, they have their own curricula that is created just for them- so automatically dormitory and classes are deleted of the list of making possible contacts with Estonians. Then there are the bars, parties, sports clubs, elevators etc, still author has a theory that the Estonians, whom the exchange students mostly meet are also mobile- they have either been on exchange themselves, are voluntaries of different student organisations, tutors or the friends of the named. One author who was used in the theory part was Triandis, who claims that geographically further countries perceive culture more differently than the closer ones and collect different information at first (Triandis 1994), current thesis would like to contradict him- there was no connection between geographical distance and perceiving Estonia differently. For example four students even claimed that their nation is very similar to Estonians, one of the four was Japanese student.

Not all exchange students chose same acculturation strategies, as stated my previous researches, some were happy to live among exchange students and make friends with them and some did not like the fact at all and preferred to befriend with Estonian students. The entire acculturation finds a new font if we separate the exchange students group and Estonian students group- meaning give

every exchange students two categories where they land and then we see how differently they act. One must be capable to distinguish the difference of what they say and how they actually act- There was a direct connection with the two best adapted persons and their choice to learn both languages offered- Estonian and Russian- this allows to draw a conclusion that the persons who make an effort to find local friends and also show it more intensely by studying languages and searching contact rather than just saying that it is hard to create contacts. The students who are really keen on having Estonian friends also have them, it is not easy to make contacts but it was brought out several times that once the barrier is broken then the Estonians are friendly and willing to collaborate. It is easier for the nations who have just few representatives here to make Estonian contacts, as Japanese said he uses Japanese classes of Estonians to make friends, because Estonians are just curious about his culture. Author finds it remarkable that some male students brought out a clear distinguishment in male and female openness of Estonians. The women tend to be friendlier and easier to get along with. Maybe it is just the attraction factor, as we are speaking about opposite sex, but there is a chance that Estonian girls are more open to foreigners than guys or maybe it is a generalization that applies to all nations. As outcome of Pajupuus research (Pajupuu 2005): people tend to think positive of the unknown. Then after getting to know new culture and seeing that not all have the same mentality and that cultures are different the image goes down because mostly all new is not taken with positive connotations. Later when people can adopt to both the old and new way of seeing things also the image goes to rather positive one. The exchange students experience proved that this generalisation does not apply on them- they first had negative stereotype in mind and with the first contact it went to very positive, later after few months and many Estonian contacts later the idea of Estonians went back to rather reserved, but very helpful.

As for the university then author is of the opinion the marketing solutions are not the best, having been to 6 universities past year, none of the local offices there knew TU, had no brochures and no info about TU, but then again, these universities probable do not know much about Estonia anyway.

On the other hand once the decision to study in TU has been made then this communication is really good- the emails are answered fast, the web page gives all main information etc. The strategies used in Estonian universities (leading to as easy adaption as possible, by having English classes and university staff being fluent in English) versus Spanish Universities (only Spanish language accepted in university, voluntaries and lectures) witch one is more successful in terms of exchange students making local friends and does the language matter at all, especially in two completely different cultures and mentalities, where almost all Estonians speak good English and find a common language with

exchange students versus Spain where not many Spanish speak good English and in order to communicate exchange students need to learn the language. The Spanish data in this thesis is received from talking to Erasmus Student Network National Representative of Spain (2007-2009), Jordi Piulats and being on a meeting with representatives of more than 20 largest Spanish university ESN voluntaries in Eivissa (May 2009). But come to think of it, then students who were interviewed claimed it was of top priorities for them that there were English classes, Estonian language is very hard to learn and it is such a small language that probability of using it outside Estonia is minimal. Author stands by the strategy that TU is using- make it as easy to adapt for the students as possible, otherwise the mobility numbers would decrease and the experience would not be half as good if to force on a language that students do not see a point of studying.

Coming back to the theory of present thesis then the Hofstede's five dimensions (described in chapter I) are supported by the interviews made. The present thesis reapproves Hofstedes quantitative work on the basis of 10 qualitative interviews made. Individual vs collective dimension was clear in the dormitory lifestyle- some student chose to mingle with exchange students and some did not, instead they searched for contact with Estonians. Masculine vs feminine dimension strike out to nations whose living standards back home are more equal and higher (Sweden, Holland). Long term oriented vs short term orientation- Estonia was seen rather as a short term oriented country compared to Holland or Japan. The former soviet countries saw that Estonians have everything under control (on the orientation) and mentioned the fact how organised everything was- that claims the truth vs order dimension. And as for the hierachial vs equal then maybe this was the one that came out least, as author did not interview any extremely hierarchical nations and Hofstede also sees Estonia to be quite equal on these terms.

When we apply Triandises 4 points of culture (Triandis 1994) we see that we could even give this culture a name- Mobility culture. Exchange students form their own culture in Tartu, they do not mingle with Estonians that much, they are quite isolated and their contact to Estonians culture is minimal. Triandis (1994) finds four main points to define cultural stereotype: *What goes on in our culture is seen as ``natural`` and ``correct``, and what goes on in other cultures is perceived as ``unnatural`` and ``incorrect``*- students often oppose exchange students to local students, for example saing local students are reserved and cold whereas the foreign students are opened to new contacts and friends.

*We perceive our own in-group customs as universally valid.-* acting bold and spontaneously is a

key word to exchange students. Exchange students think, at least at first, that all students are like them, but local students are not in a foreign environment and they concentrate on different things.

*We believe that it is natural to help and cooperate with members of our in-group, to favor our in-group, to feel proud of our in-group and to be distrustful of and even hostile toward out-groups* (Triandis 1994: 251-252) again exchange students oppose themselves to the local students all the time- in class, in dormitory even in parties as comes up in the interviews. At one point they do not even try to make Estonian friends or contacts because the inner group is large and gives plenty of possibilities.

Students choose Estonia because they do not know anything about it, it is exotic in this way. This argument brings me also to a conclusion that the students who are here are extraordinary in the whole mobility group - they dare to experience the untold and discover a new culture on their own. For future reference author suggests to look more into how the conditions are back home and in Estonia, especially in University level, as it tends to be quite different and yet there are precise items that can be studied.

## **Criticism to the work and methods**

### **1. Questions for the interview**

- Some answers were too abstract and often the exchange student didn't remember what they first thought of Estonia and TU was. (Comparison questions about home country and Estonia; first impression questions about Estonia, Estonians, TU, dormitory etc)
- There were no questions about their everyday life and things that they will miss most about Estonia or what they miss about home- these series of questions would have given another perspective to look at on the terms of variety in Estonia.
- Some questions were too hard to answer and sometimes Author got the impression that the fact of being a student in TU and also being Estonian did not give the critical views as people tried to be polite. (Critical questions about TU, professors, voluntaries)

### **2. Interviewees:**

- Two students English was on another level as the others. On the other hand it is not possible to choose person from a ``rare`` country and be picky about weather or not to interview them- its

little bit worse English or no answers from more distant cultures.

-The 10 persons chosen were the best that Tartu University could offer- some students from China and India were not available, they did not answer their emails or phones. No one from Baltic states students was interviewed due to the exam period that is happening same time the interviews were taken. Author evaluates that having interviewed also students of Baltic states would not have changed the analysis much.

- Too many close cultures were represented: Holland, Italy, Sweden, Czech, Turkey- five European countries are overruling the other five in some cases, but on the other hand the analysis is made with consideration of that factor.

### 3. Interview method:

The interviewing method worked very well, in my opinion it was the best choice, as the quantitative questionnaire would have given very superficial answers and no background or personal stories/experience behind some reasons. We have to keep in mind that these answers are based on personal experience and not see a whole nation or even civilization behind one persons answers. The criticism part starts to play with some people, who were personal friends with the author- that might lead to some answers that would normally not have come out.

## Summary

Every exchange student carries one's country and culture along anywhere they go. Every year the mobile generation is growing throughout the number of students participating in the Erasmus or other exchange programmes. Power of ambition and wish to learn something different drives students to experience life abroad. As the modern world demands, the Estonian organisations also need to keep up with globalization and get hold of more and more international students to come to Estonia.

Exchange could not be successful without information sharing in between universities about different study possibilities that are eventually to be found by the exchange students. Many different channels are used for that – the home university, exchange students offices, web pages, Facebook, forums, YouTube, former exchange students, fairs, ESN etc. etc. The numbers of incoming students are growing steadily in Estonia and also all around Europe - one of the main reasons for that is the good conditions created via the Erasmus programme and all other programmes supporting students to study abroad.

The present thesis is divided into the following parts: firstly, a theoretical overview is given, followed by the empirical background of the same subject, but more localised on Tartu Universities results and statistics; secondly, cross case and within case analysis of the structured interviews is given. Ten exchange students and two experts were interviewed based semi structured method. The author interviewed ten exchange students from all over the world studying in Tartu University and also two experts on the matter adaption and adoption of students. This method proved to be the best as it answered the research questions and served well in explaining the main aim of this thesis: to find the cultural distance dimensions (on Hofstede's dimensions) compared to Estonians, meaning how the exchange students get adopted to the new environment and situation. The best and most profound answers for cultural differences and dimensions came up when interviewees were asked to compare their home land to Estonia or native people to Estonians or universities systems and student life. One of the main aspects that students are happy about is having the opportunity to make so many friends all over the Europe and also over the world.

Exchange students lead a different life in Tartu, and anywhere else, than the local students- they have more free time, their classes are not that strict and they are all in a new situation, opened to new contacts. This all is part of being an exchange student, the more mobile ways and openness to new

country and cultures, the wish to discover something new. The students who come to study in Estonia are a small part of a big mobility group and they tend to be the ones searching for more exotic and undiscovered countries, mostly countries they know very little of.

Tartu University is interested in improving and having more incoming exchange students - good contact and support of the voluntary organisations and the preliminary plan for the next five years of the university clearly state that. Tartu University is doing all possible to adopt the exchange students into the university- there are classes taught in English, academic staff speaks English, students are put to live with other exchange students. There is no direct need for the incoming students to learn Estonian or to make Estonian contacts, hence two basics to adapt better to society are voluntary, not implemented as it is in some countries.

To conclude from authors part, this topic was of my great interest and many new research areas that deserve to be studied were found. There is a lot to do from state and universities part to make the exchange students feel themselves better and more integrated during their stay in Estonia, but in general they were happy to be here and they see that most of work has already been done. ESN has the human resources and casual student ways to improve the main area- integrating exchange students into Estonian student society. For the future: exchange students in Tartu are great subjects to study. Many fields on this topic are still undiscovered as the Erasmus phenomenon is not older than 21 years and the changes in Europe will appear clearer in the near future.



## Kokkuvõte

Iga vahetusüliõpilane kannab endaga kaasas nii tükikest oma maast kui ka kultuurist. Mobiilne generatsioon kasvab aasta aastalt nii Erasmuse kui ka teiste üliõpilasvahetuse programmide läbi ning üliõpilaste järjest kasvav õppimis- ja avastamiskirg tänu rohkele võimalustele suunab neid üha enam välismaist elu ning õppimisvõimalusi katsetama. Ka Eesti organisatsioonid peavad tänapäevases kiiresti arenevas ühiskonnas ülemaailmse ning –Euroopalise globaliseerumisega sammu pidama, pakkumaks siinsetele studeerivatele välistudengitele parimaid õppe- ning elutingimusi.

Eduka üliõpilasvahetuse tagab ülikoolidevaheline piisav infolevik ning õppevõimaluste põhjalik tutvustamine erinevates ülikoolides ja muudes infokanalites, mille eesmärk on aidata üliõpilastel otsustavaid valikuid teha ning haridusteed planeerida. Infokanalitena töötavad efektiivselt nii kodu- kui ka välisülikoolide üliõpilasesindused ja nende veebileheküljed, aga ka mitmesugused laialdast kasutamist omavad rahvusvahelised infoportaalid, näiteks Facebook ja YouTube. Samuti korraldatakse ülikoolide juures tihti vastavasisulisi infopäevi tutvustamiseks üliõpilasvahetusega tegelevaid organisatsioone ja nende tegevust. Üks tuntumaid taoliste organisatsioonide seast on Erasmus Student Network, mis tegutseb edukalt nii Eestis kui ka kogu Euroopas, ja kelle efektiivne töö aitab kaasata aasta aastalt üha enam tudengeid, kes üliõpilasvahetuse kasuks otsustanud on.

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö annab esmalt ülevaate töö temaatikaga seonduvast teooriast ning seejärel empiirilisest taustast, mis keskendub eelkõige Tartu Ülikooli puuduvatale statistikale. Intervjueerisin töö käigus kümmet hetkel Tartu Ülikoolis õppivat ja erineva kultuurilise taustaga välistudengit ning kaht antud valdkonna eksperti. Kasutatud meetod võimaldas põhjalikult vastata töö uurimisküsimustele ja toob välja töö peamise eesmärgi, milleks on kultuuriliste dimensioonide väljaselgitamine ja suhestamine eestlastega. Kõige ilmekamad ja põhjalikumad vastused iseloomustamiseks kultuuridevahelisi erinevusi ilmneseid, kui intervjueeritavatel paluti võrrelda oma kodumaad ning rahvast Eesti ja eestlastega ning kodu- ja välisülikooli ning üldist üliõpilaselu. Üks olulisemaid aspekte, mille välistudengid Eestis õppides tähtsaks hindavad, on võimalus kohtuda paljude erinevate inimestega üle kogu Euroopa ja maailma ning sõlmida sõprussuhteid ja kontakte. Vahetustudengid elavad teistsugust elu kui kohalikud üliõpilased: neil on rohkem vaba aega, nende loengud ja õppekava on üsna paindlikud ning olles uues keskkonnas on nad avatumad ka uutele kontaktidele. Kõik see on osa vahetustudengiks olemisest, mida iseloomustab vabam suhtumine ja

avatus uutele kogemustele ja kultuuridele. Tudengite näol, kes Eestisse või mõnda muusse väikeriiki õppima tulevad, on paljudel juhtudel tegemist noortega, keda huvitab eelkõige teadmatus ja eksootika, mida Eesti-taoline väikeriik neile pakkuda võib.

Tartu ülikoolis on välistudengite adopteerumine tehtud võimalikult lihtsaks- nendega suheldakse inglise keeles, neil on oma inglisekeelsed õppekavad ning nad elavad kõik üheskoos. Tudengitel puudub otsene vajadus luua kontakte eestlastega või õppida ära Eesti keel, fakt, et kaks põhilist adopteerumist hõlbustavad näitajat on vabatahtlikud vähendabki nende võimalusi.

Kokkuvõtteks autori poolt, see teema oli minule väga südamelähedane ning ma leidsin palju uusi valdkondi, mis vääriks sügavamat uurimist. Riigi ja ülikooli poolt on veel päris palju teha, kuid märkimisväärne on see, et välistudengid tunnevad, et päris palju on nende heaks juba tehtud. Erasmus tudengite uurimine on üsna uus suund, kuna see programm on alles 21aastane, ning suured muutused Euroopas on veel tulemas.

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\*Statistics about exchange students in 2008/2009 fall semester

[http://www.ut.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=444936/2008-2009\\_sygis\\_sisseast.pdf](http://www.ut.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=444936/2008-2009_sygis_sisseast.pdf)  
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\* Information about the dormitory of UT : [www.kyla.ee](http://www.kyla.ee) (22<sup>nd</sup> December 2008)

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<http://www.ut.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=44005/uldinevordlus1988-2008.pdf> (23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008)

# Appendix I

Table 1. closeness of other cultures

Name	Very close	Rather close	Little bit close	Not close
Chriss	<u>Est, Fin, Dk, nok,</u> <u>swe, USA, Canada,</u> <u>Mex, caribeans</u>	Lat, lit, Uk, Irl, Jpn, Aus, NZ, Brzil, argentina, germ, aut, swz, ita, spa, port, belgium, hol, lux	Chi, korea, africa, arabic, israel, Fra, Pl, CZ, slo, Rus	India, bhut, Arm, geo, kaz, bulg, croa, serb
Ali	<u>Estonia, Usa,</u> <u>Canada, Isreal,</u> <u>Arabic countries,</u> <u>Italy, Spain, Portugal</u>	<u>India, Bhutan, Nepal,</u> <u>Australia, New</u> <u>Zealand, Brazil,</u> <u>Argenina, Equator,</u> <u>Mexico, caribeans</u>	Lat, Lit, Swe, Fin, Dk, Nok, Germ, aut, swizerland, pl, Cz, slo, rus, belgium, hol, bulg, craotia, serbia, Africa	Geo, moldova, belorussia, ukrain, france, Japan, China, Korea
Carlos				
Daigo	<u>Est, Chi, Korea,</u> <u>Japan</u>	Fin, Swe, Dk, Nok, Germ, Aut, Swz,	Lat, Lit, Usa, Canada, Fra, Pl, Cz, Slo	Uk, Ire, Ind, bhut, arabic, isreal, mex, caribbean, croa, serb, geo, arm , kaz, africa, brazil, arg, Ita, Spa, Port, rus, belg, Hol, Lux,
Katja	Usa, canada, Rus	Uk, Irl, Africa, Isreal, Arabic, Fra, ita, spa, port, pl , cz, slo, arm, geo, kaz, belorussia	<u>Est, Lat, Lit, Chi,</u> <u>korea, Aus, NZ,</u> <u>Ger, Aut, Swz,</u> <u>mex, caribeans,</u> <u>bel, hol, lux,</u>	Fin, swe, dk, nok, jp, india, bhut, brazil, arg, bul, croa, serbia
Nielss	<u>Est, Usa, Canada,</u> <u>Belgium, Holland,</u>	UK, Ireland, Brazil, Argentina, Mex,	Lat, Lit, fin, Swe, Nok, Dk, Aus,	Jp, Chi, Korea, india, Bhut, arabic, isreal,

	<u>Luxembourg</u>	Germ, Aut, Swz, Fra, Ita, Spa, Portugal,	NZ, Africa, Pl, Cz, Slo, Rus	arm, geo, kaz, bulg, croatia, serbia
Petr	Usa, canada, UK, Ireland, Australia, New zealand, Pl, CZ, Slovakia, slovenia	Germ, Aut, Swizerland	Lat, Lit, Ita, Spa, Portugal, bulg, Croa, serbia	<u>Est, fin, Swe, dk, nok,</u> <u>jp, chi, korea, india,</u> <u>bhut, africa, arabic,</u> <u>israel, brazil, mex,</u> <u>equator, caribeans,</u> <u>france, armenia, geo,</u> <u>kazakhstan, belgium,</u> <u>holland, lux.</u>
Sofia	<u>Est, fin, dk, nok, swe</u>	USA, Canada, Aus, NZ, FRA	UK, ireland, Bra, Arg, Eq, GER, AUT, port, Bel, hol, lux, thailand	Lat, lit, jp, chi, ind, bhut, israel, arabic, mex, carib, pl, cz, slo, arm, geo, kaz, rus, bul, croa, serb
Tiko	<u>Est, Lat, Lit, Jp, bra,</u> <u>arg, eq, ger, aut, swz,</u> <u>ita, spa, port, arm,</u> <u>geo, kaz, belorus,</u> <u>belgium, hol, lux</u>	Fin, swe, nok, dk, usa, canada, mex, carib, fra, pl, cz, slo, rus	Aus, NZ	Chi, korea, india, bht, africa, brazil, bulg, croatia, serb

## Appendix II Expert interview

### Basic

How do you do? What is your position in UT ? How do you like your role? Relationship to exchange students? What are your tasks? How often do you see/meet exchange students? On what level, occasions? What atmosphere? How do they perceive you mostly? What languages do you speak? What countries are your preferable to visit? Why? How often do you get contact with other than west civilization nationalities?

Do you meet exchange students outside of your work time? What do you do then? How often do you meet them? What is the reason to meet? Do you prefer spending your free time with estonians or exchange students?

### Cultural distance

5. What nations do you find to get along with Estonians the best? Why do you think it is like that? can you please give examples from your experience? What nat have most conflicts with estonians?
6. What nations are the furthest for Estonians in terms of understanding? Why do you think so?

### Difficulties

4. Do you think the exchange students are happy to be here? Why so? What are they most happy about? And what are they not satisfied with? Why?
5. Why do you think UT is attractive to exchange students? What is the main reason for growing numbers of exchange students? How long do you think these numbers will be growing? Why will it stop?
6. What do you think is the main obstacle why students do not come here? Why?
7. What is the reason for not that many exchange students defending/finishing their degree here? Staying longer than planned?
8. What issues, in your opinion, make it easier/more difficult to adopt to Estonia?

### Universities role

\* What channels do you use to approach exchange student prior to their arrival? What channels are most used by exchange students to get information about UT? What channels are yet undiscovered? From uni to ex and from ex to uni (both ways)

15. what is Uni doing to help exchange students feel welcome? How is that helping?
16. What is the action plan for first two days/weeks? Orientation week? Buddy system? Tutors? Activities? How helpful to do you consider them to be?
17. How do you solve conflicts on your events? If you hear about exchange students causing trouble? Needing help as being the victim?
18. What else can be done to support/help exchange students? What is the main problematic area here?
19. What do you think needs to be improved?

## Appendix III Semi structured interview plan of the exchange

I- general introductory questions

Some general questions about you.

Where are you from?

What do you study?

How old are you?

What is your nationality?

How long have you been in Estonia?

### **II- arriving to Estonia and earlier information**

Please describe how and why you are in Estonia

*Why did you decide to study here?*

*What other choice did you have (Was it your first choice?)*

*What program are you attending?*

*How easy was to get accepted?*

*What else was an important factor to come study here ?*

What did you know about Estonia prior your arrival?

*What exactly had you heard before? About Estonia? Tartu? University? Estonians?*

*Where did you hear it from? What channels did you use?*

*Do you consider that you had enough info?*

*What were your emotions before arrival?*

*Positive emotions? Fears? Explain and bring examples?*

Please describe Estonia when you first arrived here?

*What was the first thing you noticed?*

*What was your impression of Estonians? Estonia? University? Tartu?*

8. How satisfied you generally were that you decided to come to Estonia?

*With what were you most satisfied / unsatisfied?*

*How satisfied are you generally with your living conditions?*

*How did you find the place in the dormitory?*

*How is Raatuse different from dormitories in your home town?*

*Is it common in your country to stay in dorms?*

### **III – experiences and contacts in Estonia**

What do you think of Estonia now that you staid here longer?

*Compare Estonia to your own country! What are the main differences / similarities?*

*Compare Estonia to other countries where you have been!*

*Tell me about your best and worst moment in Estonia?*

*What do you like most about Estonia? And least?*



What do you think of Estonians now that you staid here longer?

*Can you please describe an Estonian?*

*Compare Estonian to your own nation? What are similarities / differences?*

*What other nationalities are similar to Estonians?*

*What nationalities do you mostly get along with here in Estonia?*

*How do you get along with other exchange students? Estonian students?*

*How much contact do you have with Estonians? In what situations? Where exactly?*

*Where do your get your news about Estonia? What internet sites do you use?*

#### **IV- cultural distances**

Which countries you feel are the closest to you?

*Which countries are closest? Which are furthest?*

*Why these countries?*

*Which countries have you visited? Heard from media? Have any friends?*

*Why did you group the countries so?*

*Would it be possible to group these differently?*

Can you name your 5 most favorite countries?

*Why is that so?*

*What countries would you like to visit most? Why so?*

*What is your connection to those countries? Have you visited these countries? What have you read/ heard about these countries (in media)?*

What languages do you speak?

*What is your mother tongue? Second- third language?*

*Why have you decided to learn these languages?*

*What is the closest language for you? And the furthest? Comment and explain*

*What languages would you learn now?*

#### **V- improvement issues**

How could university or other institutions help you to integrate better?

*Should ut concentrate more on international students?*

*How do you think UT could attract more international students?*

*What are the biggest negative points in the perspective of the university?*

Do you think your university has more exchange students?

*Why is that so?*

*Are the conditions in your university similar to our exchange students?*

What do you think of the volunteers?

*ESN? AEGEE?*

*Were they helpful?*

*What did you expect from them?*

*Did they help you integrate with Estonians?*

*Do you have friends among them?*

Are you going to come back to Estonia?

*Would you consider working here?*

*Making a PhD?*

Will you recommend your friends to come study here?

*What will you tell them about Estonia and UT?*

*What will you remember of your stay here in 5 years?*